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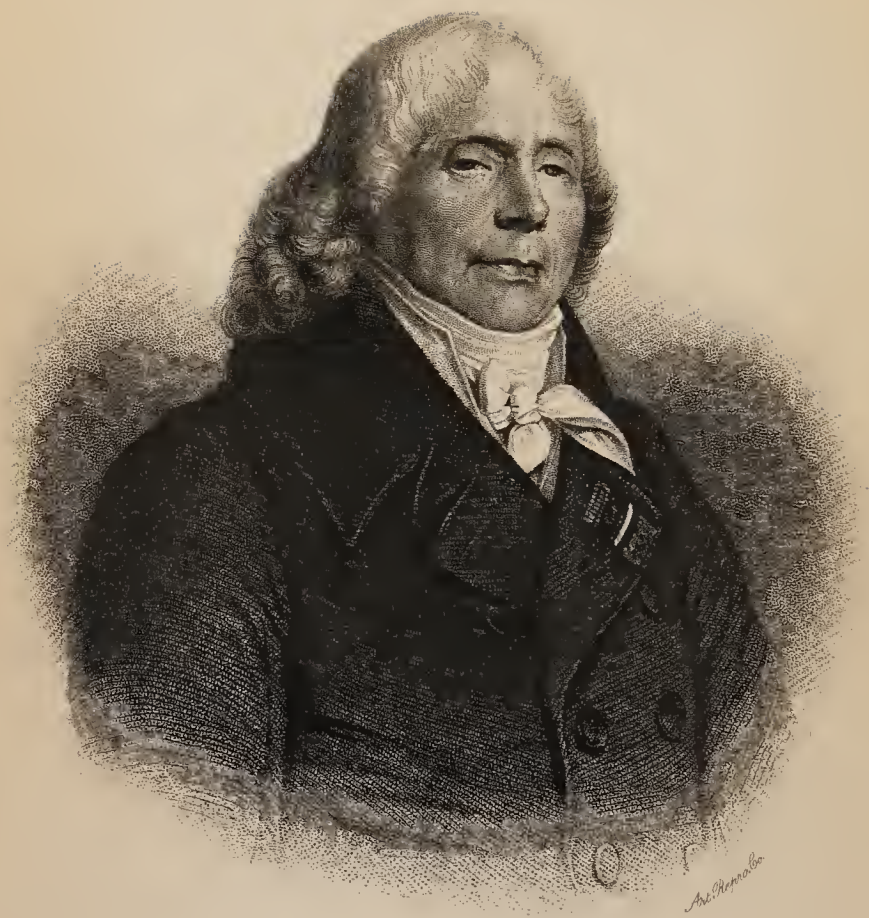
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ch. maurice de talleyrand

PRINCE TALLEYRAND AND HIS TIMES

BY
FRÉDÉRIC LOLIÉE

AUTHOR OF "GILDED BEAUTIES OF THE SECOND EMPIRE,"
"THE LIFE OF AN EMPRESS: EUGÉNIE DE MONTIJO,"
"LE DUC DE MORNAY," ETC.

ADAPTED BY
BRYAN O'DONNELL, M.A.

WITH PHOTOGRAVURE AND FIFTEEN OTHER PORTRAITS



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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

TALLEYRAND was a genius of many parts, second only to the great Napoleon in the influence he wielded during a period unique owing to its great importance. The name of the great statesman is printed upon each page of the history of that period, and his proteiform image, although apparently wearing the same set mask, has been reflected in numberless sketches which have thrown light upon all its facets, imparting to it both brightness and variety. We have therefore deemed it interesting to draw a picture of ensemble representing him both in his individual and multiple capacities, as he witnessed and took part in the various social transformations that occurred during his long life.

The versatility of Talleyrand's character has whetted many activities. Much has been written concerning his moral personality, his thousand and one views, and his wit, but it seems difficult to express everything concerning a physiognomy so complicated not only by its own nature, but by the numberless events which it reflected.

The life of such a man is necessarily many-sided, and it is no easy task to throw full light upon all its subdivisions. The task had to be accomplished, however imperfectly. It is many years since Sainte-Beuve commented in the following terms upon a splendid analysis of Talleyrand, written by Bulwer-Lytton :

“It is not articles or essays that should be written about Talleyrand, but a whole book, a weighty volume.”

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When he expressed this opinion, and sketched the lines upon which the work should be written, we were not yet in possession of the famous statesman's memoirs, invaluable documents, though doubtless mutilated to a great extent, inaccurate on many points and subject to query in many cases. The pages of honour relating his diplomatic work had not yet been unearthed by scholars like G. Pallain and P. Bertrand. No revelations concerning his private life had then come to light. The substantial chronicles of the Duchesse de Dino and the many documents found in the archives and published by Albert Sorel and others have given a fresh impetus to the work of modern historians.

We have been unable to compass the whole of this weighty subject in a single volume, and have been compelled to treat it in two separate parts without, however, breaking the train of thought or the sequence of the narrative. The second volume begins with an account of the Imperial liquidation, which was mainly caused by Prince de Bénévent, on the eve of the famous Congress of Vienna, which coincided with the inception of his second public career.

This present volume is complete in itself, and relates the details of his education, the curious period of preparation for the Priesthood and a compulsory Episcopacy effected amid a round of worldly pleasures and the pursuit of worldly business. We next come to the important part played by Talleyrand during the Revolution, to his missions to London, his most unwilling journey to America, and his return to France amid the turbulence caused by the methods of the Directoire. His doings as a Minister under the Government of "The Five" and under the Consulate, and the principal events of the Empire in which he took part, either openly or secretly in order to combat or to defend it, form part of the narrative. Its gaps are filled in with restful halts, consisting of pictures of the various periods which represent in their intimate sincerity the variations of French society under the different régimes through which he limped

with a lame leg, but with eyes wide open. Finally, a parallel study of Napoleon and Talleyrand affords a comparison of two natures as opposed to each other as could be, the one embodying the all-devouring genius of war and conquest, the other representing the power of calm and weighty reasoning used in behalf of a methodical ambition.

The second volume will deal with the opening proceedings at the Congress of Vienna, an interval between two tragedies. Facts, impressions and the influence wielded by Talleyrand during the first and second Restorations, his last evolution in favour of the Orleans dynasty, his residence as Ambassador in London, which was the crowning of his dearest and most enduring wish, his period of retreat in the princely home at Valençay, under the tender care of the Duchesse de Dino, his witty sayings and interesting recollections with the hosts of Valençay or Rochecotte, some worldly sketches of the Court and the Salons, the supreme dual episode, the conversion of the last hour, the almost theatrical death of this great actor, and, finally, a general appreciation of the man and his work, both of which have given rise to diverse opinions, such are the subjects which fill the closing chapters of our study.

Our work has been done in a spirit of accuracy, impartiality, and fairness towards the memory of one upon whom have been lavished the for and against of excessive praise and excessive blame, the latter often assuming the proportions of violent invective.

The novelty of this long work resides mainly in the way in which it is treated, providing in the course of one and the same narrative full details upon the private life of Talleyrand, while not neglecting the study of the social circles in which it had its being under eight different régimes or forms of Government.

Thanks to a secret but authentic link, we have been enabled to connect its latter developments with our studies of the history, customs and doings of a later period called the Second Empire.

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With all his seductiveness and his faults, with his supine dilettantism, his solid qualities and his moral chasms, Morny will appear in reduced proportions as a family portrait with a strong resemblance to his natural grandfather, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord.

FRÉDÉRIC LOLIÉE

PARIS, *June*, 1911

ADAPTER'S PREFACE

IT has been my privilege to collaborate with Frédéric Loliée in his works upon the Second Empire. When endeavouring to introduce it to the British public in the garb of the English language, I am conscious that failure has often attended my efforts to preserve the grace, the lightness, the wit of the original version by placing upon its shoulders the heavy weight of an idiom quite foreign to the expression of Gallic thought. If I have attempted the difficult task once more, it is because the present subject lends itself to treatment in all tongues. It is comparatively easy to lay before the British public the history of a life so absorbing as that of Talleyrand, so intimately linked to that of Napoleon, the overpowering genius of war, and so closely connected with the history of our own country during that period in which England stood practically alone as the defender of Europe's liberty and independence, against the repeated onslaughts of an insatiable ambition.

This work is so replete with matter of pregnant interest, so alive, so palpitating, so absorbing, that the brilliancy of the matter treated will, I trust, obtain forgiveness for the poverty of its treatment at my hands.

The history of Talleyrand's life is in truth the history of the world's events from 1775 to 1832. Moreover, it contains the roots of subsequent events which were but the boughs that sprang from the trunk, the offshoots, the effects of the cause, the natural conclusions, in many cases foreseen and foretold by the greatest diplomat of his time. Talleyrand's all-absorbing activity did not confine itself to the study of French questions alone. As Foreign Minister, he endeavoured to shape Napoleon's policy, and to impart to it some moderation and some

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regard for the benefits of peace. That his efforts were fruitless was proved by the fact that the conqueror of the world breathed his last as a prisoner of war upon the lonely rock called Saint-Helena. The Minister failed to bridle the appetite for conquest which devoured the conqueror. He failed, although he spared no effort to achieve his end, and it is due to his memory to lay before the world the facts contained in this book, because they go far to prove that in many cases the acts of disloyalty perpetrated by him towards his Emperor were in truth dictated by his prescience of the inevitable results which must accrue to conqueror and conquered alike, unless Napoleon were debarred from laying waste the world and spreading death throughout its length and breadth.

In this first volume, which ends with the return from Elba (1814), the historian has added numerous facts to those already published by other writers. It includes an interesting narrative of Talleyrand's missions to England, of his relations with Pitt, Fox, and other British statesmen, of his residence in America, and his impressions of the American people and their institutions. Fresh light has been thrown upon the many intrigues conceived by Talleyrand with a view to securing peace in Europe, and it is fair to surmise that a perusal of this work will alter the minds of many as to the true character and motives of Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord.

The study of the social life of France under eight different régimes is treated with that brilliant piquancy which is one of Loliée's greatest charms. To preserve a tittle of it in this English version has been the fondest desire of his sincere admirer,

BRYAN O'DONNELL

LONDON, *October*, 1911

PRINCE TALLEYRAND AND HIS TIMES

CHAPTER I

TALLEYRAND'S CHILDHOOD AND EARLY YOUTH

The youth of Talleyrand—A necessary preamble—The Talleyrand-Périgords and their genealogical pride—Two distinct examples of it—The early youth of Charles-Maurice—Family ambition and carelessness are in strange conflict in the pursuit of his education—How he joined the Church against his will—His career at the Collège d'Harcourt—His year's residence with the Cardinal-Duke Archbishop of Reims, a residence the object of which was to make him cherish and appreciate the dignities of the Church—At the Seminary of Saint Sulpice—A period of melancholia—A happy diversion in his youth: his first love affair—The divinity student and the actress—Mlle Luzy—Talleyrand's frame of mind when he took Holy Orders—The Abbé at Court—His worldly debuts at Versailles and Paris—A description of society towards the end of the reign of Louis XV—Madame Du Barry—Reims—Splendid ceremonial of the consecration—Talleyrand's studies at the Sorbonne—The daily occupations of a Sorbonne student at the end of the eighteenth century—Talleyrand resumes his social pursuits.

THERE was a man who during three-quarters of a century influenced the councils of Europe by his subtle activity, a courtier and a Churchman, an active statesman and a diplomat, always and everywhere a great and mighty lord, an accomplished master in the art of pleasing and seducing, upon whom fortune smiled to such an extent that he was fortunate in love, in politics, and in speculation. Master of his passions, he led two Revolutions with the utmost calmness, trapped Kings and Emperors in his network, creating and shattering at will many monarchical dynasties. He took and broke many oaths, threw in his lot with twenty parties,

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and was faithful to none, because he considered that obedience to circumstances meant obedience to reason. He was more flexible and versatile than any diplomatist, and combined the talents of a Mazarin, a Retz, and a Voltaire. He could lend himself with inimitable grace to the most frivolous nonsense ; without apparent effort he would pass on to the most intellectual and enlightened considerations. He had as many defects of the soul as qualities of the mind ; a venal man, with no illusion, no principles save his personal interests and affinities. He found arguments in favour of every cause and in justification of every act, but he was logical and consistent in his object, and wedded himself to the service of the most ardent ambitions which at times swept him along by the sheer force of events without, however, making him relinquish his external policy, which was ever moderate and humane. A Minister, a high dignitary of the Church, and an Ambassador under several régimes, he was accused of a thousand treasons and a thousand breaches of faith ; but thanks to his unique personal authority or to the demand for his talents, he always regained public confidence, notwithstanding his many falterings. Suspected by friends and enemies alike, vilified by countless pens, insulted, baffled, confronted by contrary opinions, by uncertain and hostile judgments, he wrought a miracle by closing his long life as the recipient of the most noteworthy marks of universal honour and respect.

.

It is the life story of this remarkable man, the subject of so many conflicting judgments, that we have undertaken to write from its inception, following it continuously through the social phases and extraordinary events of its time.

.

Charles-Maurice de Périgord was born on the 2nd of February, 1754. His ancestors were high and mighty,

Talleyrand's Childhood and Early Youth 23

and the surname of Talleyrand, which was to become so famous, had been borne by his family since the beginning of the twelfth century. He could trace his pedigree farther than that of the Capetian dynasty, for he was descended in direct line from the Counts de Grignols, Princes de Chalais, who asserted that they were a younger branch of the suzerain Counts de Périgord, and in consequence adopted the proud motto, "*Rè que Diou.*"¹

The famous statesman's family pride did not forsake him on his death-bed. When King Louis Philippe came to bid him a last farewell, Talleyrand greeted him thus, "Sire, this is a great honour for our house." By this he meant to convey, that like the Bourbons the ancient Counts of Périgord had reigned as sovereigns before Périgord had become absorbed by the Crown.

Louis XVIII had remembered this fact when in 1814 he received Talleyrand for the first time at Compiègne.

"Our houses date from the same period," said the monarch, but my ancestors were more skilful than yours. Had it been otherwise, you would now be saying to me, 'Pray take a chair, sit near me, and let us discuss our business.' To-day I say to you, 'Be seated, and let us chat.'"

These words were as able as they were graceful. Their value would have been further enhanced if the inconstant Louis had always acted up to them. On another occasion he cast doubts upon such a fine genealogical tree, and whispered to his neighbour, "Talleyrand is not 'de Périgord,' but *du Périgord*" (Talleyrand is not Périgord, but he comes *from the Périgord*). As a matter of fact, some archive searchers had been employed to prove that the Princes de Chalais had nothing in common with the Princes of the Carlovingian era, and were not entitled to trace their nobility beyond 1461. Whatever were the merits of this heraldic dispute, the Talleyrands could certainly boast of more lineage than appanage. Though not possessed of large patrimonies, their position

¹ "There is none but God above us."

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at Court made them quite independent, and enabled them to secure preferment and comparative wealth for their children. The Court was the granary and foster-mother of poor noblemen. When the Talleyrands first joined it in 1742, they lived on a very modest footing, but they came into as close contact as possible with the fountain source of favours. They soon reaped through their own efforts a rich harvest of well-paid appointments, episcopal endowments, assignments of property, and rich abbacies.

The great-grandmother of Charles-Maurice was Madame de Chalais. She had inherited the estate of Mortemart, where she practised that refined politeness and accurate use of elegant expressions which was the natural language of the family.

His paternal grandmother was a lady-in-waiting to the Queen. She resided permanently at Versailles, where she fulfilled her duties and earned the esteem of the King and the respect of all right-minded people, though they criticised her great reserve and her excessive piety. She had five children, and devoted much more time to the furtherance of their interests than to their education.

His father, Charles-Daniel de Talleyrand-Périgord, was the son of Daniel-Marie de Talleyrand, Count de Grignols, a brigadier in the King's army. Charles-Daniel was Lieutenant-General and equerry to the Dauphin. He was quite satisfied with his position, and led a very quiet life. He was married to Alexandrine de Damas, daughter of Joseph de Damas, Marquis d'Antigny. She attracted much more attention than her husband, but without effecting much result. She was very assiduous at Court, and bowed low to those in high place, quite ready, if needs be, to climb up to the garrets of the Palace of Versailles. During the short apotheosis of the Comtesse de Mailly; she was known to play cards with Mademoiselle Jacob, the lady's maid of Louis XV's mistress. She lost all taste for cards, however, when the King became converted, and Madame de Mailly was banished from Court.

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The company of her children was in no way indispensable to her happiness, but she spared no effort in forging a career for them during their minority, without, however, neglecting to cater for herself. Madame de Talleyrand cared less for the practice of disinterested virtue than for the good reputation to be earned by it. She was ever eager to add to her possessions, and the method of her saving ways was often likened to that of a miser.

The birth of Charles-Maurice had not been eagerly looked for, or so it would seem, at least, considering the joyless greeting extended to the new-comer.

There is a strange difference between the ideas and customs of different times. In our modern society it is usual to lead a family life in which the children reign supreme. They are the object of endless sacrifices and enduring affection on the part of their parents. Their amusements are fully catered for, and their mental convulsions, which seem to be caused by joy, are duly noted and shared. Every smile, every gesture of darling baby is the object of parental comment.

Among the privileged classes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the sweet joys of hearth and home were much discounted. The children of the nobility only saw their parents on state occasions. Among the middle and working classes, mothers were not compelled to forsake duty for pleasure, and their children were loved and well cared for; but in higher spheres there was no time to fulfil the obligations of nature save in an intermittent and superficial way. This seeming indifference was somewhat atoned for by the fact that the scions of great families had little need for education, inasmuch as the paths which they had to tread were wide and level from the onset. Upon such easy courses there was no need to urge them. Their progress was automatic. They had only to let themselves live in order to enjoy life to the fullest extent.

These paths were made as easy as could be for young Talleyrand, though he was starved of paternal caresses

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during his early years, which were all spent away from home. In common with people of their rank, his father and mother considered that it was the duty of parents to maintain an attitude of indifference towards their children, but this did not prevent them from promoting their interests at the proper time. At the age of four, he was still farmed out to a woman who lived in a remote suburb of Paris. Many years elapsed before he was honoured by the condescending gaze of his father. He was also the victim of material negligence, for when still a baby a servant let him fall, and in consequence he was lame all his life. Mme de Talleyrand was grieved; but not to the extent of bestowing upon her son the solicitous care of a mother. In his old age, Talleyrand recalled upon the first page of his memoirs the strange fact that he had never slept under the roof of his father and mother. Like the Duc du Maine and Lord Byron, he was lame, and like the Prince and the poet, he was much affected by this physical infirmity on account of the part he played with women. Puns and cruel remarks, insolent allusions and mocking glances were called forth by his lame leg, the halting of which was often compared to that of his sentiments and his acts.

We have said that the accident was caused by the carelessness of a servant. This was at least the explanation afforded, but it was often said that it was due to a congenital defect. According to the evidence of Maurice de Périgord's cousin, the latter had a club foot; what is more, this cousin, also a Count and an Abbé, and his fellow-student at Reims and Saint-Sulpice, stated that there had always been a club foot in the Talleyrand family. Whether his infirmity was accidental or congenital, it exercised a great influence upon his destiny. As he was deemed unfit for an active life, he was deprived of the right to wear a sword, a right which was his, as the first-born of the family. So, willy-nilly, he was trained for the Church. After being long forgotten in his suburban residence, he was sent to the family castle in Périgord to his great-grand-

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mother, Madame de Chalais, whom he called his grandmother, and who had expressed a wish to have him with her. He was not five years old when a governess bearing the great name of Charlemagne accompanied him to Chalais in the Bordeaux coach, which accomplished the journey in seventeen days.

The grandmother fell in love with the child. She bestowed upon him the greatest affection, appealed to his soul, to his nascent mind, and trained him by her good example. All this was new to the child. His respect and love for this high-born lady were increased by the tokens of gratitude bestowed on her by all and by the signs of intense respect shown by those who approached one who to them represented power and mighty influence. He was happy when told that his name had always been worshipped in that province, that it was his forefathers who had built its churches and given houses and land to its inhabitants, and that thus from generation to generation they had increased the intensity of the good feelings entertained towards them. Meanwhile, he contracted habits and manners which endured all his life. They were dictated by a sense of dignified and simple politeness, the living model of which was Madame de Chalais. This was the happiest period of his childhood, and it was tenderly remembered by him during his strenuous life. He was soon recalled to Paris, and sent to the Collège d'Harcourt. He had learnt at Chalais just what well-bred people knew there, sufficient for the sake of happiness, but not enough for that of science, to wit, reading, writing, and a little of the Périgord dialect. These rudimentary notions were ample at the age of eight, but henceforth he must learn something more. He cried bitterly on the day of his departure, for his separation from Madame de Chalais was a great wrench. He had to leave the old ancestral home, a lovely country, and all his affectionate friends, to be cloistered between the four walls of a dreary college. The heavy coach bore him away one morning, and during the journey his sadness

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was somewhat dispelled by the cracking of the whips, the neighing of horses, the variety of the hostleries, and the many incidents along the road. At last he reached the terminal coaching stage, Rue d'Enfer. He eagerly sought his father and mother, but in vain, for they had deemed it more sensible to spare themselves the effort of needless effusions. An old retainer met him, and took him straight to the college.

Charles-Maurice arrived in Paris at eleven o'clock in the morning. At midday he was seated in the refectory, beside a sympathetic schoolboy with blue eyes and open countenance, who remained his friend through life. His name was Choiseul, and he afterwards became the Comte de Choiseul-Gouffier. After dinner, he was led to the apartment of his cousin de la Suze, and put under the same tutor, one Abbé Hardy, whose name was the only enterprising thing about him. He performed his duties benignly. Once a week he accompanied his pupil to the parents' house, where the child partook of dinner with them. Conversation was always sparse, and as soon as the meal was over, the same admonition was solemnly given to the boy in the following stereotyped terms, "Go back to college, my son; be a good boy, and try to meet with the approval of Monsieur L'Abbé."

The Abbé Hardy and his successor, the preceptor, Langlais, were easily satisfied. A cursory knowledge of the history of France was the sum total of their attainments. As a result, the progress of the pupil was decidedly slow. The family was not anxious that Charles-Maurice should display exceptional ability, which might have made him less tractable. Besides, he had had a severe illness at the age of twelve, and this interrupted the course of his studies. A virulent attack of smallpox compelled him to leave college, and he was carried in a sedan-chair to the house of a professional nurse in the Rue Saint-Jacques. Notwithstanding the weird prescriptions compounded in those days, he was doubly fortunate in escaping the dangers of the disease and of the doctor. His con-

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valescence was rapid and he was soon back at College, where he had finished his preliminary studies. He was soon informed that he had to go through another and a more special programme at the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice, the nursery in which young Clerics were carefully trained. Before he joined, it was deemed wise to afford him an opportunity of appreciating all the advantages of the calling for which he was intended. He was therefore sent to spend a few months with his paternal uncle, Alexandre de Talleyrand, a high dignitary of the Church, coadjutor to the Archbishop of Reims and a future Count. His journey on this occasion was effected with more pomp than his previous one. A post-chaise came to fetch him at the Collège d'Harcourt, and he reached Reims in two days.

Though only twelve or thirteen years of age, he already wore a cassock, and Madame de Genlis, who saw him at Sillery, was greatly struck by his appearance. He was a pale and thoughtful youth, with pleasant features, and seemed a keen observer.

A good deal of luxury and solemnity were displayed at the Archbishop's house. The illustrious prelate, Comte de la Roche-Aymon, and his coadjutor, were treated with almost grovelling respect amidst most fastuous surroundings.¹

Charles-Maurice was impressed, but in no way dazzled by all he saw. He had come there full of youthful honesty of purpose, which both preceptors and professors did their best to dispel. Definite instructions had been sent from Paris to the effect that as he could not wear a sword, the Church was the only career open to one bearing his exalted name. His studies and reading all tended to convince him of the fact. He was directed to peruse the memoirs of the turbulent Cardinal de Retz, the history by Fléchier of the great doings of Cardinal Ximénès, or the Life of Archbishop Hincmar, the im-

¹ This prelate and mighty lord lived upon a most luxurious footing. When he died two years later, from an attack of gout, his debts were so heavy that his estate was not sufficient to meet them, though his income was over thirty thousand pounds a year.

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perious priest of the Middle Ages, who was possessed of such a subtle and energetic genius. By the help of such teachings, his mentors strove to kindle his ambition while harbouring him in the bosom of Mother Church. He was afforded another example of ecclesiastical greatness in the person of one of his ancestors, Cardinal Hélié de Talleyrand-Périgord, who lived in the fourteenth century, and was made famous by Petrarch. His masterly influence in the conclaves had earned for him the name of "Pope-maker." This Cardinal was, no doubt, a priest "tenuous and scanty in matters religious," but in worldly matters he towered above all men as a diplomatist, a Counsellor of Princes, and a Protector of the arts.

A year's residence in these surroundings was considered sufficient for the young man's education. He soon grew tired of offering any resistance to the parental decision, and proceeded to the Seminary, much against his will. He knew that once across its threshold, he had entered the vestibule of the sacerdotal career. His juvenile conscience had not yet gained that elasticity which was to prove so useful to him in the future, and it troubled him because he was following a calling he had not chosen. Notwithstanding the noble examples put before him, he was not convinced of the propriety of following a career with the sole intention of using it as a stepping-stone to another one. He recoiled at the idea of becoming a priest in order to be one day a diplomatist, an Ambassador, and a Statesman. In practice, this makeshift was, of course, attended by sensible advantages which had been brought to his notice, such as the acquisition of wealth, honours, and glory. What he felt most was the state of moral abandonment in which he was left at Saint-Sulpice as he had been at the Collège d'Harcourt, ignored by his own kith and kin, who were too much wrapped up in aristocratic selfishness to take any notice of him. In later years Talleyrand tried to convince himself of the true cause of his parents' action by attributing it to their secret affection for him,

which urged them in his own interests and those of his family to enforce their will against his. He conceived, or professed to conceive, that they might not have had the courage to carry out their object had they been the recipients of his confidences and bewailings. This was the explanation with which he consoled himself for their long neglect of him, and in due time he expressed his gratitude to them for having followed such a course. He attributed the results achieved by him to fortuitous causes, such as his early education and surroundings, and was wont to praise the theological studies he had pursued in spite of himself. He assigned to them a large share of that sagacity, that power of thought and expression which held him in such good stead in the treatment of weighty matters.¹ His scholastic apprenticeship, especially at the Sorbonne, and those battles of ideas in which reasoning acquires strength, subtlety, and ductility, were, in his opinion, the most precious adjuncts of his education. It seems true that controversial arguments, with all their feints and captious deductions, have much in common with the scientific counterfeits and the clever subterfuges that wrap the diplomatic "yes" or "no" in the prudent folds of uncertainty. Man's views change according to the periods of his life. During the sad period of Talleyrand's existence at the Seminary, he did not take such a complacent view of things, but bitterly resented the injustice done to him by the parents whose eldest child he was. He did not openly express his anger, which only hard work could soothe. His keen intellect was sharpened by his trials, and scepticism became its dominant note with regard to religion, family, and society. He ceased to

¹ Ernest Renan was such another case. Though most indefinite in the principles of an illogical philosophy of an untutored morality, and of a religion stripped of dogma and of symbols, Renan remembered that he too had had a religious education. He wrote: "I owe my clear-sightedness and in particular my talent in the art of dividing and classifying thoughts and matters (an essential condition in the art of writing), to my early ecclesiastical education" (*Souvenirs of my Youth*; Renan).

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be sincere from the moment he entered the circle of human action, because he was forthwith compelled to disguise his true feelings. He had to play a part and exercise a ministry without faith in its tenets.

The dawn of his sixteenth year was chilled by a sort of concentrated sadness. He would neither allow himself to be questioned nor amused, and the hidden reason of it all was never guessed by his good-natured masters or by his inquisitive fellow-students. At that age he was already buried in his thoughts, his regrets, his unsatiated desires, but never tried to relieve his mind by confiding his troubles to anyone. He lived in a state of isolation, spending weeks and months without opening his mouth, and was in consequence looked upon as a proud, haughty, and deceitful youth. His morose nature was due to the fact that he found himself alone in the world without the guiding light of friendship, without the joys of the family hearth which imparts to us each morning a keen perception of the evening's joys.

Youth, however, inevitably claims its share of the pleasures of life. His heart and brain were troubled by a neurotic need for some indefinite affection long before his slumbering senses were awakened by the roar of turbulent passion. Suddenly a ray of love shone forth, bringing light and warmth to the dark spring-time of his life. This ray of light had found its way by chance through the stained-glass window of a chapel into the innermost recesses of his heart. In this chapel of Saint-Sulpice, where the elect of the Lord came to be sanctified, he had often gazed upon a graceful and vivacious image which was not hidden between the leaves of its missal. It was that of a young girl, whose air of modest simplicity at first attracted his attention. She had become most assiduous in her attendance at all the important services, and from the day he noticed that fact, he did not miss one himself. He soon nurtured a keen desire to hear the sound of her voice. One day, he summoned courage and left the house of God when she



MADAME DU BARRY

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did. As they reached the door of the church she hesitated to proceed farther, for the rain was falling heavily. The occasion was a favourable one, and he promptly seized it. Saluting her respectfully, he offered her the use of his umbrella. She accepted it, and having exchanged a few commonplace phrases, they soon came to mutual confidences. He was an unhappy young man! She was an unhappy young girl! His parents had compelled him to become a clergyman! Her parents had insisted that she should devote her life to that diabolical pursuit, the theatrical profession! A double iniquity of fate! Their nascent sympathy was quickly kindled by their mutual misfortunes. As they related their sorrows and troubles to one another, they reached the Rue Férou, where the interesting creature lived. She allowed him to come up to her rooms, not wishing to interrupt so pure and charming a conversation, and with equal candour she suggested that he should return to see her. He accepted the invitation with much joy, calling at first every third or fourth day. His visits soon became daily ones. It was sweet and comforting to exchange such secret feelings. What could be more cruel than to consign to a Seminary a young man so unfit for such a calling? What blacker injustice could be perpetrated than that of compelling a pure and limpid soul of twenty summers to play a part in farce or comedy? ¹ Mlle Dorinville, *alias* Mlle Luzy, did not always have to complain of the sad necessity which compelled her to go on the boards. (This was her name, though Talleyrand never mentioned the fact.) ² She soon appreciated a calling which affords pretty women triumphs on the boards, private success in the wings, and pleasures of all sorts strewn on the paths of the "*legitimate profession.*" She became a thorough *comédienne*, proud of the fact, and expressing her opinion in a loud voice. Did she

¹ She was considerably over twenty, having been born in 1747.

² Dorothee Dorinville, whose stage name was Mlle Luzy, was a member of the *Comédie française*. She first married P. F. Guillou, a barrister, and then J. G. Maris, a solicitor (1717-1830). (See Frédéric Loliée, *La Comédie française*, page 154.)

not exclaim one night in the foyer of the theatre, "Could we not find some means of doing without these knavish authors?" She resented the fact that the said authors dared to draw fees from the funds of the *Comédie française*. At this earlier period, however, she declared that she was sacrificed and sorely in need of the consolation of the Abbé de Périgord, who likewise sought hers. So they comforted each other during many long and sweet hours. This provided balsam for their wounded souls. She had very little wit, but her ardent admirer discovered much of it under the transparent veil of her radiant beauty. Moreover, he remained convinced that she had expended much of it during those long conversations of bygone days. "I never perceived that she was wanting in wit," was the ingenuous confession he made, a most amusing one coming from such a man as Talleyrand.

This adventure, though perhaps not the first in his youthful experience,¹ rejuvenated him completely, and he threw himself with much energy into the pursuit of his studies. His superiors congratulated him upon a change the cause of which they were loath to seek. Because they, too, possessed the art of remaining silent, of chiding, or of closing their eyes according to circumstances. His theological course at Saint-Sulpice was a brilliant one.

The Abbé Sièyès, whose soul was not more ecclesiastical than that of Talleyrand, had left Saint-Sulpice four or five years sooner. He, too, had lived through a period of sadness, due to a mode of life in accordance with his natural tastes. The day was near when Charles-Maurice would have to come to a definite decision. He went through a painful crisis caused by the last revolt of his subdued conscience, before receiving the Sacrament of Ordination. That same conscience was doomed to become so supple, so malleable that nothing could perturb it. On the eve of the ceremony, his faithful friend Choiseul-Gouffier came to see him, and found him

¹ We do not think it wise to relate the incident of a poulterer's daughter's love affair with the youthful Abbé de Périgord.

in tears, wrought by desperation. Choiseul asked him why he did not push the chalice from his lips while it was yet time, since the sacrifice of his moral independence proved so heavy. He replied that he was tired unto death of struggling against his mother's will, his own weaknesses, and the pressure brought to bear upon him by his family. He did not feel the courage to face a belated scandal. Once more he sighed, wailed and bowed to fate.¹ When the sacramental words had been pronounced, he was surprised at the sense of perfect peace which filled his mind and heart. He had adopted a calling which afforded both compensations and advantages. The hard years of College studies were over, and he made up his mind to combine in his existence the enjoyment of life's pleasures with due regard to the external respect for his condition and the pursuit of vast projects. He had been introduced to Voltaire, and though he only saw him twice, the recollection of those meetings proved an enduring one. They provided him with a very useful preparation for an ecclesiastical life. In this eighteenth century soaked in scepticism, souls consumed with the divine love were merely legendary reminiscences. The sons of the nobility who had entered the Church in order to obtain the rich benefits it afforded, or because they were destined to them by heredity, did not suffer from that anguish which tortures truly religious souls when about to confront much-dreaded mysteries. On the contrary, they considered it right to ignore the religious obligations of their position and to assume the graceful ways and garments of Court Abbés till such time as they were promoted through velvet paths to the eminence of a prelateship perfumed with worldly fragrance.

Charles-Maurice de Périgord, whose education was nothing if not austere, had tastes and tendencies both

¹ Talleyrand was ordained a priest on the 18th of December, in the Chapel of the Archbishop of Reims (Archives of the Department of the Marne).

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sociable and facile. He felt certain that his talents, his personal qualities aided by intrigue, his name and his connections, would soon enable him to reach the highest positions.

The title of Court Abbé was sufficient in itself to give its holder a certain rank. In those days everything was easy to one possessed of youth, pleasant features, breeding, and family influence. He determined to make use of all these attributes without forsaking pleasure. He was twenty years of age when he came to Court, possessed of great intelligence, refined tastes, and keenly developed senses. The inner social circle to which his birth gave him access received him with open arms. He had barely opened his lips when all present declared that he was endowed with natural taste and sagacity. A happy exclamation, an "oh! oh!" an "ah! ah!" judiciously placed, would win him favour in the best houses. Now and again he afforded himself the luxury of a witticism in support of his statement. He was invited everywhere. He wore his little round collar with much elegance, and his expression was both benign, witty, and impertinent. He could cast glances both discreet and insinuating which expressed everything without words, and he had certain ways of saying things which did not need the help of any glances. Were not these good reasons why society should seek the young Abbé de Périgord, the same reasons which had ensured the success of Flahaut and Morny, his indirect descendants? He did not personally boast of his success, but all Paris was soon apprised of it. On the morrow of his arrival at Court, he was the well-beloved of those professional lovers who now and then dispense their favours to men of fashion and of rank. The acceptance of them is a mighty advertisement for the dispensers which seldom fails to effect its desired result, the whetting of aspirants in humbler if in richer walks of life. Field-Marshal the Duc de Richèlieu, whose duty it was to relate each morning to his royal master the events of the previous day, both at Court and in

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Town, said one morning to Louis XV: "That little Abbé will go very far, and will outstrip me yet."

The Périgords were all willing lovers. His father, the Chevalier de Talleyrand, would have been very grieved if a crown of conjugal fidelity had been placed upon his brow, although his love-adventures never reached the concert pitch of scandal. His younger brother Joseph knew the full value of pleasure. He was ardent, full of skill and daring in the pursuit of his amorous undertakings, courageous, loyal, discreet, capable of heroic abnegation, and he therefore occupied the time and hearts of many grateful ladies. One night he scaled the balcony of the beautiful Duchesse de Guiche and a duel ensued.¹ On another occasion a justly angered husband found him in the apartments of his wife. Her lover had but one wish, and that was to save the honour of the guilty one. He escaped through the darkness, and in doing so met with a fatal accident. His hand was caught and mangled in a heavy swinging door. Drawing his sword, he stoically cut off the three fingers which were pinned, sooner than call for help and thus compromise his companion. His liaison with the favourite of the Comte de Provence,² his many exploits and good fortunes had earned for him the well-deserved fame of a successful lady's man. Charles-Maurice de Périgord did not run as many risks, but, with equal success, promoted his interests in gay and pleasant company. Between times, he learned to judge minds and characters in the company of those privileged by their birth and of those whom favours or intrinsic

¹ He had been recognised, arrested, and then set free. The adventure was soon known to all. An eager crowd filled the *salons* of Madame de la Vallière, in the hope of hearing the latest details. The pristine virtue of the King was much shocked at the incident, and he said to the pretty Duchesse, "Madame, are you going to follow in your mother's footsteps?" A slight blush betrayed her emotion, and when her husband (who was the last one to hear of what had happened) reproached her with her conduct, she expressed her repentance in the following words, "Why, Monsieur, surely, this on your part is much ado about nothing. Your father was a much finer gentleman."

² The Comtesse de Balbi.

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merit had placed in the front rank. He was destined to witness, in the course of an extraordinary career, the rise and fall of so many different régimes, an autocratic royalty, a republic with a thousand heads, a demagogic dictatorship, a Cæsarian Empire, and a constitutional monarchy. This long experience began with a short and rapid vision of the declining reign of Louis XV. His curiosity was naturally awakened as soon as he reached that extraordinary circle known as the Court of Versailles. Hour by hour he could follow the struggles, intrigues, and rivalries of those who constituted it at a time when the King's private life was a source of great scandal. It undoubtedly hastened the coming of the Revolution, aided in no small measure by the many failures of France's foreign policy, and the untold misery endured by the French nation. The secret cabals of the private apartments, the antagonistic manœuvres of the two factions called "Les Barriens and Les Dissidents";¹ the sullen but intractable animosity of the young Dauphine against the insolent self-assertion of her father-in-law's paramour; the bitter rancour of the King's ugly daughters, who, bereft of beauty, grace, lovers, or spouses were, one and all, but idle slanderers; the deadly opposition offered by the whole Royal family, which no warrant could consign to the Bastille, and the echoes which reached Paris from Chanteloup² afforded rich elements for observation with such a setting and such a cast.

Sometimes the reception was held in the Gallery of the Castle, and a new arrival like Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand found much interest in these gatherings, at which the King greeted all those who were presented

¹ The "Barriens" were of course the protégés and supporters of Mme Du Barry, the King's favourite. "Les Dissidents" were the would-be purists, who disapproved of the King's doings.

² Chanteloup was the property of Choiseul, the fallen Minister, and the meeting-place for all the malcontents of the Royal family, for his partisans, who had fallen with him, and for the avowed enemies of the Duc d'Aiguillon, his successor. Monsieur Maugras has ably treated all these facts and Court incidents in his interesting work entitled, *The Downfall of the Duc and Du hesse de Choiseul*.

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before proceeding to the gambling-tables. At other times a circle of more intimate friends foregathered in the apartments of the titular and actual heiress to the Marquise de Pompadour. The smaller gathering was no less instructive than the larger one. Talleyrand had obtained access to this charming little nest in which everything was new, spruce, and fresh. It was situated over the apartments of Louis, and state affairs were oftener discussed there than in the presence of the King. When he first met the "Sultana," she had had ample time to refine her wit and manners. None could have recognised "the creature," "the woman of nothing," as she was called by the Duchesses who envied her position, when she curtsied low to the royal master, whom she had captivated by her graceful smiles. She had more the appearance of a Queen than her predecessor. She wielded more power than Cardinal Fleury, and she looked every inch a Queen, with head erect and beautifully poised, as she chatted gaily or dealt out cards to her inseparable companions, the Duchess de Valentinois and the wife of Field-Marshal de Mirepoix. By force of habit she had assumed an air of importance, and spoke like a Pompadour about the Government, its Ministers, and the eminent services which could be rendered to the State by a favourite like herself, who could so easily secure the promotion for her friends. She had recently proved her influence by causing the downfall of one Ministry and the triumph of the Duke d'Aiguillon, after six months of hesitation and of hopes born and deceived. She had dislocated the all-powerful faction of the Choiseuls, whose forces were enumerated by Talleyrand in his memoirs; and last, but not least, she had compelled La Vallière to serve a warrant upon the Duchesse de Gramont, forbidding this proud and energetic Egeria of the late Prime Minister to reside in or come within forty-five miles of Paris. Young Talleyrand had ample opportunities for studying the morality of his time. It afforded, indeed, a charming spectacle. The souls of titled women were seething

with rage, and they did not hide the fact. They sulked, intrigued, and plotted. They resented the action of the King, who had more than emulated, with La du Barry, his past doings with La Pompadour, and who had chosen his new favourite among the humbler classes, instead of selecting for such an exalted position some member of the highest aristocracy of the land. They contended that such a position at Court should be held by one who could boast of illustrious breeding, and thus lend the dignity of her rank to the importance of her duties.

Since La Comtesse du Barry had been appointed lady-in-waiting to the King, she was seen everywhere in the front rank, at the supper-parties of Choisy, in the company of the noblest women of France, at the theatre in her private box, which was next to the Royal box. Her apartments were ever filled with eager visitors. Among them was the Abbé de Périgord, who did not blush at being seen in such company. Such personalities as M. de Mercy, the Ambassador of the Empress Marie-Thérèse and the confidant of her intentions, were often wont to seek private ordinances with the royal mistress. The hereditary Prince of Sweden, the future William III, once left the ball-room of Madame La Dauphine and hurried to pay his respects to Madame du Barry, bearing a diamond collar for her dog as a grateful souvenir of certain political conversations which he had had with the late seamstress. When the most powerful lords of the land deemed it proper or useful to bow low and kiss her hand, a young Abbé at Court would have been foolish indeed had he allowed his scruples to block the way to fame and fortune, though it lay along the rosy path of scanty virtue. Moreover, the company and its surroundings pleased him, so he often sought them. The profane Du Barry was the first power courted by Talleyrand, in the hopes of receiving from her his due reward. One night she was surrounded by a bevy of young noblemen, among whom was Talleyrand. On this occasion she did not wear the angelic and virginal look that Drouais, her painter-in-ordinary, was so fond of assigning

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to her. Her bright blue eyes were kindled by frank and familiar gaiety. She smiled and laughed, displaying to the best advantage a double row of perfect pearls ensconced between her coral lips. The conversation was not thickly veiled, and dwelt upon a somewhat risky subject, the very feeble resistance offered by the women of the day to enterprising lovers. The Abbé de Périgord took no part in the discussion. Was his silence due to virtue, discretion, or to affrighted modesty? By no means. The Comtesse du Barry wished to know forthwith the cause of his silence. He replied, "I was thinking, Madame, that in Paris it is much easier to obtain women than a fat abbotship."¹ Notwithstanding his lukewarm zeal for ecclesiastical pursuits, he longed for a suitable and well-endowed living which he considered indispensable for the gratification of his temporal desires. He already chafed at having to wait, though he had barely crossed the threshold of the Church. His hint was understood. As the favourite was dressing the following morning, chatting to the King who sat admiring her shapely neck and shoulders, she repeated to him the witty saying of the ambitious priest. Louis XV was much amused, and would not have forgotten to act upon it, had he not been stricken down that same year. Shortly after his death, the Abbé de Périgord was awarded the coveted living, a certain well-endowed Abbacy called Saint-Denis de Reims. This was the stepping-stone to his great fortune, but soon after there was no more Louis XV and no more favourite. The King's successor, all too young and too weak to carry the heavy burden of State, was about to be crowned at Reims, and Charles-Maurice de Périgord was sent there to witness, under the auspices of his uncle, the coadjutor, the imposing gathering of the powers of heaven and earth.²

¹ His friends had recently failed to obtain a living for him. (See our work entitled *The Duc de Morny*.)

² "The greatest of all national events is undoubtedly the coronation of a King. On such occasions Heaven consecrates our monarchs, and strengthens the ties which bind us to them" (Mirabeau upon the Coronation). He wrote this pamphlet when a prisoner in the fortress of Joux, in 1775.

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Marie Antoinette was often heard to say, "I shall never forget the day of the Coronation." She was happy then, and the King was popular. The nobility believed its privileges to be perennial, and the exalted servants of Christ held sway in their fatuous humility. Notwithstanding a sense of general apprehension, all hearts were filled with love and radiant hopes welcomed the inauguration of a reign destined to end so fatally.

The day chosen for the Coronation was a Sunday, the feast of Holy Trinity, and the pomp and grandeur of the ceremony were thus enhanced by the idea of a mystic and divine consecration. At six in the morning prayers were begun in the Cathedral, in which had been erected tribunes and stands in the shape of an amphitheatre. The pillars were hidden by heavy folds of tapestry. At the entrance to the choir was a rood-screen, upon which was erected the King's throne. Over it was a cupola-shaped dais majestically draped with purple velvet, embossed with fleur-de-lis. The young Queen and the Princesses sat facing the Ambassadors. All the Canons were in their stalls, and in front of them were seated members of the Chapter. On the stroke of seven a flourish of trumpets and hautboys, quickly followed by the rolling of the drums, heralded the arrival of the royal cortége. Louis XVI was acclaimed as he appeared, benign and happy, in his magnificent silver mantle, under which he wore a long crimson robe braided with gold. He walked between the Bishops of Laon and Beauvais, who carried reliquaries suspended from their necks. They were preceded by the Constable of France,¹ who bore the royal sword and sheath, and followed by those who had to take part in the ceremony, all of whom were magnificently clad for the occasion. The ecclesiastical Peers wore their usual pontifical robes, but the six lay Peers, all Princes of the blood,²

¹ The Chief Constable, or "Connétable de France," held the same rank as the Earl Marshal of England.

² They were the Comte de Provence, the Comte d'Artois, the Duc d'Orléans, the Duc de Chartres, the Prince de Condé, and the Prince de Bourbon.

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were resplendent in cloth of gold and ducal mantles of purple velvet, lined and trimmed with ermine and golden crowns. On this occasion they were the companions of the King, the heir to Charlemagne, and they represented the twelve Peerages of ancient France. There was not a sound in the vast basilica. All were awaiting the arrival of the Ampulla or Holy Oil with which the King was to be anointed. The crowd outside had just seen it in the hands of the great Prior, who wore a gold cope and rode a white horse covered in white silk trappings. The Archbishop came forward and took charge of the Holy Oils, which were preserved in a gold reliquary studded with precious stones. The Bishop Duc de Beauvais and the Bishop Duc de Laval then lifted the arm-chair in which was seated Louis XVI, and repeated the usual formula, requesting the vast audience to say whether he should be King or not. As soon as he had taken the oath in Latin, the King was led to the altar, where his silver robe was removed. The Archbishop himself put the spurs upon his Sovereign and girded him with his sword. The Monarch and the Priest then knelt side by side upon a purple cushion. Four Bishops and the choir began to sing the Litanies. The Cardinal rose and knelt facing the Prince. He anointed him with the oils contained in the Chalice of Saint-Rémy. The King then donned the tunic, the dalmatic, and the mantle. The celebrant handed him his gloves and his ring, the symbol of the intimate union that was henceforth to exist between the Sovereign and his people. The Coronation followed the ceremony of the Consecration. The twelve Peers stood round their Prince, holding the crown of Charlemagne over his head. It was then placed upon his forehead by the great Almoner of France. This marked the enthronisation, the exaltation of the monarch. The military band struck up. The heavy doors were thrown open, and crowds rushed into the holy edifice, the walls of which echoed their exclamations. The Archbishop began to celebrate the sacrifice of the Mass, while the heralds-at-

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arms distributed the Coronation medals. A flight of birds began to flutter through the church. The granting of their freedom was a symbol of all the favours which the King was to bestow upon his people. The chimes pealed forth and the cannon roared, followed by the crackling of musketry. The City festivities began as soon as the King and his suite had returned to the Archbishop's house through a covered passage which led from the Cathedral to the Palace. That evening a great banquet was served in the main hall. The Abbé de Périgord was a guest at this historic feast given by the Archbishop of Reims in honour of the head of the Bourbon dynasty.

Talleyrand witnessed this display of imposing ritual. This apotheosis of symbolic liturgy through which shone feebly the candid rays of faith met his eyes, but did not reach his soul. As he left the beautiful Gothic edifice, he was no more convinced than when he entered it of the benefits he could confer upon religion, society, and more especially upon the interests of his own glory, by the compulsory exercise of a Ministry for which he had no calling. He returned to Paris a sceptic, though he did not show or state the fact. He was imbued with as much doctrine as was necessary, but most lenient as to principles, and quite irregular in their application. The authors of his days did not obsess him with their attentions; in fact, they neglected him, and in no way catered for his minor wants and comforts. They even omitted to pay the arrears of his schooling at the College d'Harcourt.¹ The Talleyrands were never in a hurry to settle family accounts when they had to do so with their own moneys, but they did not forget to promote the honour of their name and the interests of their son, who already enjoyed a very fat living. They carefully nursed the useful friendship of Cardinal de La Roche-

¹ Talleyrand devoted his first year's income derived from his Abbacy to paying off this debt, and to reward his Professor, Langlais, for services rendered.



THE COMTE DE PROVENCE IN THE ROBES OF GRAND-
MASTER OF THE ORDER OF SAINT LAZARE

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Aymon. The province of Reims had already chosen the Abbé de Périgord as its representative at the Church Assembly. The Archbishop Duke appointed him promoter of this Assembly in 1775, the year of the Coronation, and thus practically procured for him the very important position of Agent-General of the Clergy. Previous to obtaining it, he had to go through an arduous course of theology at the Sorbonne.

■ The Sorbonian method was "to lead a sociable collegiate, moral, and scholastic life." We may take it for granted that he was not hampered by such regulations. Like all Abbés of high social standing, he knew that he was bound to obtain preferment, and that one day or another he would woo some well-endowed church. He performed his essential duties, and that was about all. When at eventide he found his way into the half-lit and deserted chapel, it was not with the intention of praying, but in order to dream of the future, gazing upon the tomb of Cardinal de Richelieu, and nurturing the hope that some day he would emulate the great examples of the Bishop of Luçon as a diplomatist and a Cabinet Minister.

At the Sorbonne, he had the use of a magnificent library and enjoyed every facility for study. Though the spirit of the century had to some extent played havoc with the influence of the Church, it was to the Sorbonne that men repaired in search of enlightenment upon the most delicate questions concerning science or faith. Yet towards the end of this eighteenth century, the time of a Sorbonne student was in no way absorbed by theological exercises, by ardent discussions upon doctrines, or by the defence of or the attack upon some particular thesis. Outdoor pleasures were not neglected, and the Abbé de Périgord was assiduous in their pursuit. His attendance at lectures became so irregular that the authorities devised a system which enabled them to check the presence of students by their tendering counters bearing their names. We can hardly imagine him playing ball behind the church with the simple-minded young clergymen who pored over holy texts all day long

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and seldom broke College bounds. He knew of and sought other distractions of a less simple nature. As soon as his course had ended at the Sorbonne, he took a nice little house, filled it with books, and lived quite happily, enjoying the fullest freedom. Now and again he occasionally called upon his parents, but never stayed with them. He sought his mother when he knew she would be alone, so as to enjoy the charms of her conversation, which was never affected, but always couched in refined and delicate language. Having reaped a harvest of original ideas, beautifully expressed, and having testified to his filial admiration for this remarkable lady, he would pursue his course through society, assured of a hearty word from the Duchesse de Luynes or from the Vicomtesse de Laval-Montmorency.

The natural grace with which he took part in the frolics and gaiety of his worldly surroundings was hardly calculated to make one prophesy that this light-hearted, if somewhat ambitious, young man had the makings of a Statesman destined to decide the weightiest questions of State importance.

CHAPTER II

FRENCH SOCIETY UNDER LOUIS XVI

French society under Louis XVI—A happy period—A sketch of the early years of the reign of Louis XVI—Portraits and details concerning Court matters—The state of mind of the aristocracy on the eve of the Revolution—Talleyrand's favourite houses—Madame de Montesson—The house in the Rue de Bellechasse—A struggle for life, fortune, and success—Talleyrand, Narbonne, Choiseul-Gouffier—Ties of the mind and of the heart—The sensitive Comtesse de Flahaut and the eloquent Madame de Staël—Love and ambition—Talleyrand's methods of performing the duties of Agent-General to the Clergy—How his colleague, the Abbé de Boisgelin, enjoyed long rests in the house and company of Madame de Cavanac—Talleyrand's appointment to the Bishopric of Autun—How the King opposed his nomination—The closing of the Reign—The reasons which urged the Bishop of Autun to leave Paris and to visit his diocese—His reception—A Bishop and Member of Parliament—How Talleyrand secured a majority which sent him to Parliament.

THEY were happy times since 1780, happier than France had known since the monarchy began.¹ None drank deeper of the cup of life than Talleyrand, and none suffered more keenly when that cup was rudely dashed from his lips. The Government of the day acted with meek indulgence. The general sentiments of the King had given birth to beneficent reforms. Thanks to the wisdom of Turgot, there was a vast improvement in communications. Roads and canals were constructed, villages built, and the capital embellished with such zest that it was impossible to foresee the impending calamity which was soon to disfigure it. The luxury and elegance that prevailed in Paris at that time have afforded a model to successive generations.

¹ "I have witnessed the greatness and magnificence of the Empire ; each day since the Restoration I see the creation of new fortunes, but to my mind the splendour of Paris reached its zenith between 1783, the year in which peace was declared, and 1789, that in which the Revolution was born" (*Memoirs of Chancellor Pasquier*).

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To all outward appearances, prosperity reigned everywhere. The intense misery prevailing in country districts, famines which mowed down thousands of men, women, and children, were not even mentioned in the *salons*, where noble dames wore jewels and garments worth a ransom, and where noble lords won and lost a fortune between two minuets.¹ That there was no money in the treasury was a matter of small concern, known only to a few officials who took care not to publish the fact.²

The scarcity of money and the paucity of national credit were laid at the door of the unfortunate operations of M. d'Ormesson, and all were agreed that M. de Calonne or Necker Turgot would soon set the house in order. Optimism prevailed. The atmosphere was delightfully cool, and there was no sign of any storm upon the political horizon. As time rolled on, none doubted but that the morrow would be as happy as, if not happier, than the eve.

Audacious statements were made in conversation and daring theories propounded in writings, but they did not trouble or affect the serenity of traditional institutions. In the most aristocratic circles such audacities seemed amply covered and provided against, because such circles were convinced, by force of habit, that no human effort could disturb their peace of mind or alter the existing order of things. Yet at that very moment, huge fortunes were tottering, including that of Prince de Guéménée.³

¹ We find the following statement in the *Secret Memoirs*. It refers to the year of Coronation, 1775. "At Soissons, the unfortunate labourers who were building the bridge over which the royal procession was to pass, threw themselves on their knees at the approach of a traveller, and threw up their hands towards Heaven, lowering them again to their mouths as if begging for a crust of bread. Many of them died of want before the bridge was finished."

² There was a public debt of forty millions when Louis XVI ascended the Throne. He reduced it by three millions during the first two years of his reign. The American War brought it up to forty-two millions, and the deficit was increased in each successive year. How small this royal deficit would seem in the Republic of France of to-day, where thousands of millions of debt are accumulated without weakening the springs of general activity!

³ The bankruptcy of Prince de Guéménée was a bolt from the blue. Tragedy and comedy always go hand in hand, to wit, the following anecdote related in connection with a disaster which caused the ruin

No one could have suspected the fact, for in good society questions of money were never discussed. The only thing expected of one was to keep up appearances and do full justice to one's rank. To betray any curiosity concerning other people's means was deemed essentially vulgar. Quotations on the Stock Exchange or financial considerations were subjects to be avoided, and any nobleman who referred to them would have been relegated forthwith to the Rue Basse or the Faubourg Poissonnière.¹ The Duchesse de Gramont declared that she only knew three people who ever spoke of money, the Duc de Chartres and M. and Madame Necker, whereupon Madame Du Deffand wittily replied, "I always knew that Madame Necker spoke words of gold." The bearer of a great name, the dispenser of favours, was considered independent of such commonplace considerations as money. The Princesse d'Hénin, an able and highly educated woman, was much perturbed on being warned by letter that her agent was about to file his petition in bankruptcy. Not knowing the sense of the expression, she referred to her friend Madame de Poix, who concluded that it must be some figure of speech which conveyed no definite meaning. They took no further steps in the matter, and as a result a large portion of the Princess's fortune was engulfed.

External agitations and complications did not interest this luxurious and languid society whose passions were strong and whose morals were weak. The Encyclopædic school, fashion, literature, art, and love-making absorbed the time and thoughts of an idle and elegant company. General politics only interested statesmen or philosophic historians, who discussed such matters from a personal

of thousands of families. A haberdasher worth about 60,000 francs a year lost half his fortune through the Prince's failure. He had become pompous since the aristocracy had favoured him with orders, and after his misfortune he posed as a ruined nobleman, saying to his friends in the Palais-Royal, "The loss of money is nothing to me; what I feel is the inability to keep up my social position, for now I am compelled to live on the footing of a mere commoner."

¹ These two thoroughfares represented the Throgmorton Avenue and the Lombard Street of Paris in the eighteenth century. (Adapter's note.)

standpoint. The Comte d'Osmond was called a pedant because he followed the affairs of Europe, though not compelled to do so. Madame Adelaïde, the King's sister, was so surprised at this that she said to him one day, "Monsieur d'Osmond, is it true that you receive the *Leyde Gazette*?"

"Yes, Madame."

"And do you read it?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Incredible, truly incredible."

On the other hand, public curiosity was keenly aroused by a dispute about some musical composition, the details of a matrimonial rupture, the dawn and twilight of an amorous liaison, or by the relation of the intrigues thanks to which M. De Calonne had succeeded to M. de Malesherbes or to M. d'Ormesson in office. Such matters as the latter were only broached when the conversation assumed a grave and ponderous tone. Anecdotes concerning toilettes and love affairs, petty details about petty things absorbed the mind and time of the Court of Versailles. It was difficult for those who belonged to it to reflect even for a moment upon serious actualities, or to dive anxiously into the threatening future. Their thoughts and looks were riveted upon a living picture, the shades of which were hidden by joyous rose-tints. It was a picture representing or made up of witty worldliness, sensual dreams, and graceful coquetry.

The virtues of Louis XVI consisted of modesty and honesty of purpose, combined with a high sense of morality, but so weak was his personality that few followed his example. To do so would have produced a sense of boredom among a set which lived only for the satisfaction of its pleasures. Morality had not improved since the previous reign. Conjugal fidelity and the simple life were in no way fashionable, though outward appearances were fairly well safeguarded. The Duc d'Orléans found many only too willing to endorse his principle of life to the effect that on this earth nothing can be just and fair which does not suit your individual comforts and

convenience. Most of his contemporaries of both sexes acted upon this principle, though pretending to be quite disabused of the joys and pleasures of life. High-born ladies with few exceptions were guilty to an equal extent, and did not reproach one another with having friends who were not husbands, though they exercised the rights of husbands. They made no mystery of such peccadilloes. They were inconstant, frivolous, and all the more keenly desired for being so. "Morals were only instituted for the benefit of the common herd," was the saying of the proud Duchesse de Gramont. "Our reputations grow again as fast as our hair," was the vindication offered by Madame de Matignon, *née* Clermont d'Amboise. Who would have thought of blaming the friendly relations that existed between the Duchesse de Polignac and the Comte de Vaudreuil, between the Comtesse de Châlons and the Duc de Coigny, or those of the grave Madame de Blot and the Marshal de Castries, to say nothing of a host of other charming *vis-à-vis*? Nature perfected by education has always nurtured intense sympathy. The one is the corollary of the other. As a result of this general spirit of toleration, numberless adventures and intrigues formed the current topic of conversation, together with the discussion of music and art. The acute religious fervour displayed by Madame de La Roche-Aymon since the Church had become personified under the mortal envelope of the Bishop of Tarbes, occupied the attention of Versailles for several months. The bitter-tongued Tilly wrote at length upon the matter, and also upon the endeavours of the Comtesse Balbi to become a favourite, if only of the second degree, for she never was promoted beyond the rank of mistress of an exiled Prince. It is not even certain that the honour conferred upon her carried with it any heavy obligations. Indiscreet statements were constantly made as to the miserly way in which nature had behaved towards Monsieur le Duc,¹ whose love affairs, though

¹ "Hisque bonis nimium sors mea lenta fuit!" (*Pacificus Maximus*, Elegia xx.).

much bruited by him, seemed on the whole to have been purely negative. All this was very frivolous chat, but it whiled away the time in circles where philosophy held no sway.

There were, of course, many drawbacks and many heart-burnings endured in Court circles at Versailles, especially among the Courtiers of the second and third degrees. They were constantly at Court, though they did not hold permanent appointments entitling them to receive visitors or to occupy quarters in the town or the neighbourhood, as in the case of the Duc d'Orléans, the Archbishop of Narbonne,¹ or Marshal de Laval, both of whom kept open house at the cost of the State. The minor officials spent many long and dreary days. They were the victims of stringent formalities of etiquette which had increased the number of distinctions and restrictions, imposing many wounds upon their personal pride, which was also checked by skilful intrigues of the ante-room, such as nowadays would seem intolerable. The supper in the King's apartments, the endless formalities on the occasion of gala festivities and royal journeys, the processions of Duchesses who crushed all other women with the mighty superiority of their famous footstools,² the inexorable line of demarcation drawn between resident and non-resident guests, provided as many tasks of servitude under the guise of favours. Interminable waitings, cruel snubbings and unrequited services were the price paid for the obtainment of satisfactions so dearly bought.

The bearing and gestures of the guests were ordained with infinite detail, and those who did not observe the thousand and one regulations were the laughing-stock of the Court. Much merriment was caused by Germaine Necker, the young ambassadress of Sweden, who afterwards became the Baronne de Staël, because she forgot to

¹ Arthur de Dillon.

² Only a few Duchesses were allowed the use of footstools at Court, and their stool-bearers followed them everywhere. (Adapter's note.)

curtsy and appeared at Court with a torn flounce. The previous week, when calling upon the Duchesse de Polignac, she had left her bonnet in her carriage. Such incidents provided chat and merriment for weeks. Among her critics there were many who thought themselves entitled to judge heaven and earth, assuming airs of intolerable insolence, who lived to rue the fact that they had jeered at one of the ablest women who ever graced a Court. Grace, refinement, and wit were not the only elements to be found in this exalted circle. The members of the Royal Family themselves must be analysed with much indulgence. The Queen's sense of dignity was excessive, and her regard for etiquette did not betoken a broad mind; but she was undoubtedly the first lady at Court, thanks to her sweet and amiable nature and to the bewitching smile which was hers and hers alone.¹ Madame Elizabeth, the King's sister, was endowed with all the virtues that make for godliness, and all the attractions that seduce mankind. It is equally true that Louis XVI, the grandson of the majestic Louis XIV, had the manners of a plough-boy; but his aunt, Madame Adelaïde, the wittiest daughter of Louis XV, made herself insupportable by her arrogant and autocratic ways, due to the long spell of power enjoyed by her during her father's lifetime. Madame Victoire had a good heart but a poor brain; while Madame, the wife of the Comte de Provence, was a narrow-minded, jealous woman, who seemed to have monopolised ugliness in all its phases. Her sister the Comtesse d'Artois had laid hands on such hideousness as had escaped her sister's grasp, and though essentially stupid and awkward, she was ever in quest of lovers, whom she sought whether they loved her or not. As to the Princes, especially the Comte d'Artois, their behaviour, whether in town or country, can hardly be described in these pages. The Comtesse de la Mark did not spare them in 1778, when she

¹ It was this divine Marie Antoinette who forbade the Chevalier de La Luzerne, French Ambassador in London, to visit the Duchesses of Gloucester and of Cumberland, the King's sisters-in-law, because they were not of royal birth.

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wrote, "The Princes travel as all such folk are wont to do, at a tremendous cost, and in the course of their journeys they devastate both seaports and provinces."

Such an artificial society was ever busily concerned with the foibles and weaknesses of others. Yet there were many in its ranks who wore titles, the possession of which they could not have justified as an excuse for the insolence they displayed towards the common herd. Such folks were seen everywhere, professing sublime contempt for all and everything that did not belong to their "set," bored by everything, expressing borrowed opinions, always insipid, always inflated with the sense of their own importance. Self-satisfied, vain, empty-headed, and insolent towards their pseudo-inferiors, they were small, abject, and contemptible in the presence of their betters. Many of them were fantastic and ridiculous, such as the Marquis and Marquise de Villiers,¹ whose laughable eccentricities and incredible stupidity had won for them the nickname "*Reductio ad absurdum.*" The Comte and Comtesse de Cossé were another united couple of hunchbacks who ran the Villiers very close for the championship of crass and insupportable boredom.² The Comtesse de Tessé, *née* Marie-Julie de Béthune de Sully de Charost, was an empty-headed dame who could not be taken as the model of graceful manners. The vulgar language of the old Comtesse de Maurepas was no doubt affected; but none the less objectionable. The Duc de Laval and the Monsieur de Matignon, Bishop of Lisieux, were also ridiculous persons; and Madame de la Ferté-Imbault was a lady whose sayings and doings

¹ This pretentious little Marquise was a flat-nosed little cripple, a hunchback, so fat and so short that she looked like a melon on a stool (*Souvenirs of the Marquise de Créquy*).

² Madame de Cossé-Brissac and Mme de Rohan-Rochefort, her sister, declared that they were the last descendants of the great Dunois. Cousen, alias Comte de Courchamps, alias the author of the *Souvenirs of the Marquise de Créquy*, wrote thus of the younger sister: "Marie-Dorothée d'Orléans Longueville de Rothelin, Princesse de Rohan-Guéménée-Montauban-Rochefort was a victim of the most extraordinary disease ever known. During six months of the year she was an incorrigible coquette, cursed with an awful temper and a wicked tongue, and for the remaining six months she was quite reasonable, modest, bashful, silent, and sad."

could only be ascribed to some form of mental derangement.

There was no lack at Versailles or in Paris of true and valiant noblemen, bearing proud names and mighty swords, endowed with exquisite manners; truly distinguished gentlemen, forsooth. Their ideas and language could not, however, be described as brilliant. Foremost among them were the Montmorencys, the Montesquious, and the de Lhopitals, justly proud of their Carolingian descent, but they were all too prone to judge the character and value of a man by the coat of arms he wore. The society of the Brancas was not enlivening, for the family was composed of sickly, sad, and depressing hypochondriacs, who seemed to forgather with the sole object of proving to the world at large that it is quite possible for human beings to die of sheer boredom.¹ The proof would have been irrefutable if Monsieur de Puysieux, the silliest man of his time, had joined the family circle. Numberless manias, defects of intelligence, taste, and common sense could be adduced in the case of the mighty ones of this time; but the law of contrasts enacts that the advantages of the individual, or the pleasant features of the social circle should be set forth by comparing them with their drawbacks.

In truth the aristocracy which flourished under the reign of Louis XVI possessed an exquisite charm which will ever seduce the imagination of those who love to dwell upon the past.

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Some of the coteries which went to make up a great social circle of France were really the centre of refined and subtle wit, natural to those possessed of it and so polished by education that it threw a brilliant light

¹ The Comte de Lauraguais, a famous wit, once obtained a scientific statement from four eminent doctors, with the help of which he applied for a warrant against the Prince d'Hénin, who, he said, was imperilling the life of Mademoiselle Arnould by his ceaseless attentions which were boring her to death. He sought the protection of the law for this charming actress who was indispensable to the joy of France and whose life must be preserved in the public interest.

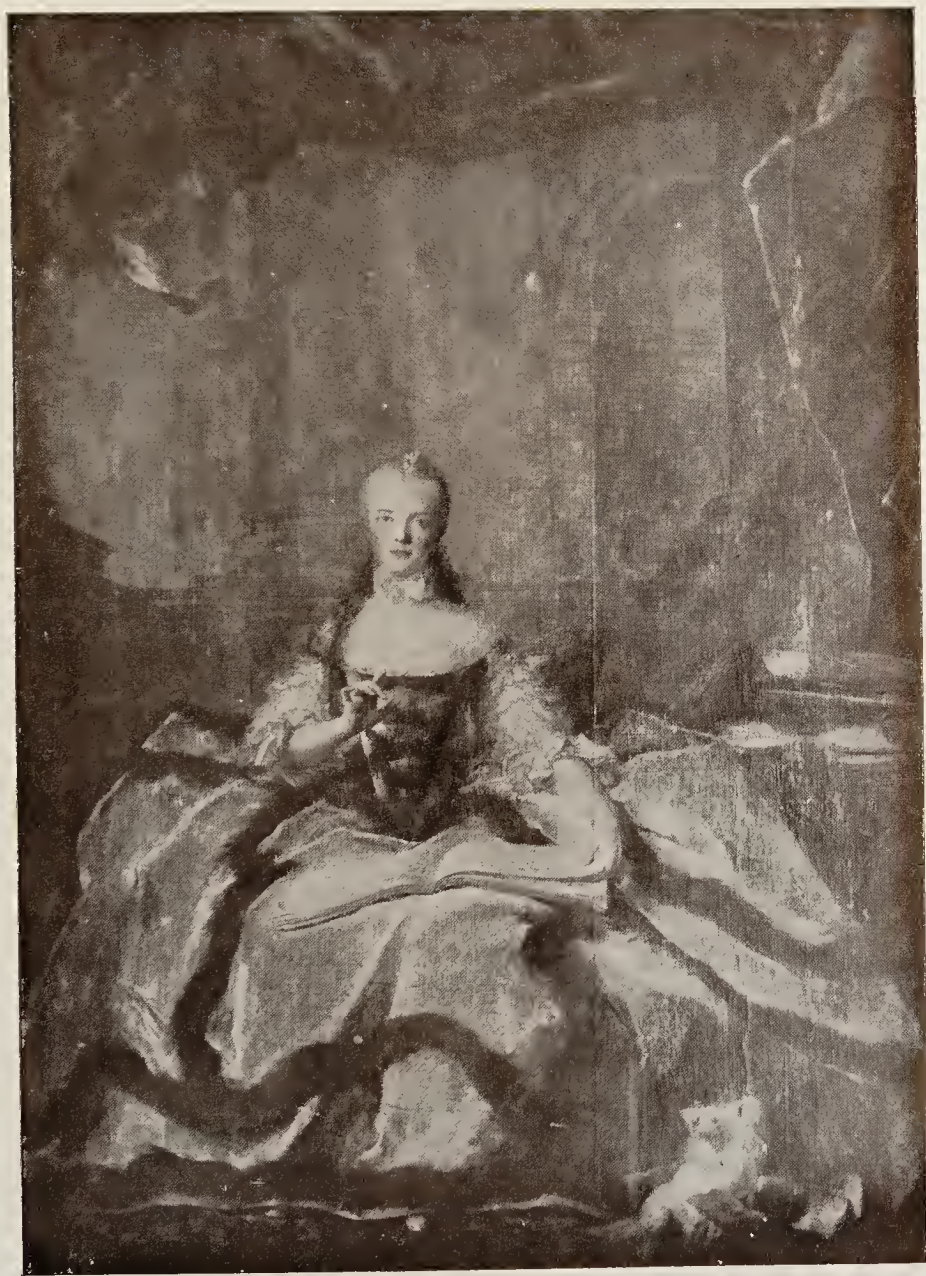
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upon the pictures of the time. None was better able to choose the best of those intellectual rendezvous than the Abbé de Périgord. He knew where to enjoy that noble and easy freedom of thought and manners, that exchange of refined attentions which were to him the ideal of a pleasant existence. In the circles in which he moved the rules of good taste were never transgressed in the course of an argument, and the most risky subjects were treated in a light and graceful manner, without vulgarity or pedantry. One and all contributed to this end.

Late to bed and early to rise, he devoted most of his time to social pursuits, to dinners, visits, and card-parties, to sweet and passing intrigues, to poetry, music, and literature. Thus he pleasantly whiled away his time because, as an unattached priest without the care of souls, he was free to devote himself to the cultivation of such relations as he considered likely to obtain for him the coveted diocese, the possession of which would enable him to effect his manifold purposes.

There were several houses which Talleyrand frequented regularly. They were the trysting-places of the select, such as the Duc de Choiseul-Stainville, the Marquis de Montesson, the Comtesse de Brionne, Madame de Boufflers-Rouvrel, commonly known as the "Idol," and Madame de La Reynière. The evenings spent in the company of Madame de Montesson seemed short indeed. She was a woman of considerable wit, who had written many comedies that were played in her own private theatre, and who put into practice her theories of love and marriage by secretly becoming the wife of the Duc d'Orléans. She had many talents, such as drawing, reading, music, but critics said that she excelled in the art of borrowing.¹

¹ The slanderous Cousen stated that when she played the harp she sat between her master, and Dangan, his best pupil, both of whom played divinely, while her part in the trio consisted in throwing chromatic glances and looking like a love-sick Saint Cecilia. She was never heard to play alone. The more frivolous members of the clergy had a private box reserved for them in Madame de Montesson's theatre. They occupied it very often. Among them were M. de Dillon,



MADAME ADELAÏDE, DAUGHTER OF LOUIS XV

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Talleyrand had been admitted to this charmed circle. So free was the conversation of these Princes of the Church that it almost transgressed the limits of common decency. Though Talleyrand found the house of Mme de Montesson particularly attractive, he was seen everywhere. The society of the time offered many contrasts which proved most interesting to an observer like himself. Delille used to dine with Mme de Polignac as the guest of the Queen; the Abbé de Balivière played cards with Monsieur le Comte d'Artois; M. de Vianes shook hands with M. de Liancourt; Chamfort walked arm-in-arm with M. de Vaudreuil, while La Vaupallièrre, Travane, and Chalabre performed the journey to Marly and supped at Versailles with Madame de Lamballe. With a view to meeting keen wits, he dined once a week with Madame d'Héricourt, the wife of an able man. She possessed three charming qualities, for she appreciated wit, young men, and good cooking. It is easy to understand how brilliant were the conversations around her table, at which were seated such men as Narbonne, Choiseul, Talleyrand, Chamfort, Rulhière, the Abbé Delille, Arnaud, and Marmontel. They all met on another day of the week at the house of Gustave de Creutz, the Swedish Minister, whose *salon* was the head-quarters of philosophers and literary men. This particular Mæcenas was prone to inflict upon his guests readings from his favourite authors. Madame d'Héricourt's friends were not all equal to listening to the interminable effusions of such as Marmontel, who did not spare his hearers a scene nor yet a line of his masterpieces. Talleyrand's courage failed him after hearing "*Numitor*." He fled, but did not find salvation, because readings were the order of the day. They were indulged in by the Comte de Vaudreuil, who prided himself upon the fact in the hopes of gaining the wits of his beautiful friend Madame Polignac.

the Archbishop of Narbonne,¹ whose name is so often mentioned in worldly chronicles and so seldom in the annals of piety and virtue, M. de Brienne, Archbishop of Toulouse, Jérôme de Cicé, Bishop of Rodez, and the Bishop of Comminges.

¹ He was second in command to the Duc d'Orléans in the house of Madame de Montesson, and later became the co-operator of Necker in that of Madame de Beauvau.

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Plays were also read in the *salons* of the Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, and in the blue rooms of Madame de Vaines and other fashionable women. The Abbé de Périgord would have gladly shunned such dull and monotonous functions, but every man of taste was expected to attend and appreciate them, so resigning himself to his fate, he assumed an air of calm resignation and mild approval, for which his hosts were truly grateful. Though he was not very fond of music, he often attended high-class concerts given by the Comtes de Rochechouart and d'Albaret or by Madame Vigée-Lebrun.

At times he used to travel in search of knowledge. He spent some time in Brittany with the avowed object of becoming familiar with this ancient and interesting province, where he prolonged his stay owing to the charming company of Madame de Girac. He spent happy and restful days with her, writing prose and poetry in honour of the beloved one, who was the sister-in-law of the Bishop of Rennes. Choiseul, Narbonne, and the Abbé de Périgord were inseparable in Parisian society. They were full of pluck and self-confidence, and decided to make their way by the help of one another. The Duc de Lauzun had preceded them somewhat, winning fame and fortune by the use of the same weapons. He was handsome, generous, gay, and beloved by women, and the four of them possessed in common youth, ambition, brains, and the love of pleasure.¹ Choiseul-Gouffier was Talleyrand's favourite companion. He did not look upon him as a man of superior intellect, but as one endowed with a vivid imagination, a noble, generous, and sympathetic nature. Choiseul's friendships were steadfast. He did his best to further the interests of his friends, but their continual society was in no way indispensable to him. Talleyrand, the keen analyst, gauged the full measure of his mediocrity and weak points, so that he did not expend upon him that intense friendship kindled by sentiment. During his youth he confided in him more

¹ The Duc de Lauzun afterwards became the Duc de Biron.

than anyone else. He knew that he possessed all the qualities of Choiseul-Gouffier, and a great many more besides, so he confided to him his future plans, both in conversation and by letter.¹

His friendship with Louis de Narbonne was more due to pleasant social habits than to a spontaneous and keen attraction. He did not consider Narbonne's character sufficiently strong to inspire that confidence which gives birth to intimacy. The same reproach might have been made to himself. Talleyrand did not spare this dazzling Narbonne, although he saw him frequently. The fact that he did so, very likely made him indulge at times in biting sarcasm at the expense of this popular hero. One morning Narbonne was reading some verses to him which he had composed the previous day. A stranger yawned as he passed them on the Terrace des Feuillants, and Talleyrand forthwith stopped his friend and said, "My dear Narbonne, you always speak too loudly. That man has overheard you!"

Narbonne was not lacking in wit, but he could not compete with the Abbé de Périgord. The two men were made of different metal. Talleyrand's tastes were delicate and refined, while Narbonne's principal charm resided in his good fellowship, which was best displayed in familiar surroundings. This was a difference which was cleverly described by Talleyrand in the following sentence:

"If the names of those who had supped with the Duc of Luxembourg were mentioned, those of twenty men would have been quoted before Narbonne's. But in an enumeration of Julia's guests,² Narbonne's name would have headed the list."³

The author of this epigram knew that he had nothing to fear by comparison. His greater art resided in his

¹ It is to Choiseul-Gouffier that he wrote the following lines, in the course of a prolonged absence from Paris: "How much I miss you, dear friend, you who are so noble, so refined, so popular!"

² Julia was a gay and fashionable lady of the time.

³ Rivarol was much more emphatic about his own brother: "He would have been considered a witty man in any other house, but in ours he was looked upon as a fool."

semi-silence, which was underlined by his keen and observant glances bestowed in moderate praise upon those to whom he listened. He reasoned internally, following the advice given by "La Duchesse" de Stendhal to her nephew, whom she wanted to shape into a second Mazarin :

"If a brilliant thought flashes through your mind, if a repartee spouts to your lips and that either should change the course of the conversation, do not be tempted to shine but remain silent ; those present will see your wit reflected in your eyes. It will be high time for you to express it by word of mouth when you have become a bishop."

The Abbé de Périgord did not follow this advice to the letter. He knew how to intervene at the proper time, and his brilliant traits were spoken in a deep and manly voice quite unexpected in one who had the features of an angel lighted by the wit of a demon. So great was his personal charm, so numerous his witty sayings, whether impromptu or premeditated, that he was commonly believed to have a pen as eloquent as his tongue. By common consent he was writing, or had already written, some famous work that would one day surprise the world. He faintly denied the soft impeachment. In fact, he made no effort to prevent the surmise from becoming a conviction in the minds of the public.

A pretty fairy tale entitled "Aline, Queen of Golconda," had just been published anonymously. It was attributed to the pen of the Abbé de Périgord, who did not deny his paternity. He went so far as to apologise for having written this indiscretion of youth, as he termed it. The Marquise de Coigny, to whom he did so, knew who was the author of this chimerical story of a princess, and forthwith informed the Prince de Craon of the false confession made to her. The Prince confronted the Abbé saying, "I have just learnt that you are the author of 'Aline,' and I promise you that I shall speak my mind to my nephew, De Boufflers, who has told us quite a different tale."

From that day, he never claimed the authorship of "Aline, Queen of Golconda."

That he was eminently equipped for such a task, is amply proved by the gay and witty letters which he wrote to his friend Choiseul-Gouffier. But not content with his own remarkable equipment, he was disposed to accept praise due to that of others, a failing common to most men. It has been said, and will again be said, that he borrowed many of Chamfort's weighty thoughts, and that many of his witticisms were really coined by Maurice de Montrond. The Prince de Beauvau has related that he once expressed his keen admiration of a quotation which had been used at the Academy.

"What a charming phrase!" said Talleyrand. "Whose is it?"

"It was written by the Bishop of Autun," replied Beauvau, who thought that the author had forgotten his own sentence, or that he was anxious to hear it recalled to him. But the Comte de Senneterre, who was blind and did not know the sound of Talleyrand's voice, hastily added, "Prince, you are not fair to M. de Chamfort, who I know was the author of that splendid phrase."

This little incident did not injure his reputation. His provision of wit was such that he could not really be suspected of being an habitual borrower of other people's sayings. He seldom wrote complimentary letters. Madrigals did not flow easily from his pen, which now and again he dipped in rose-water. When emulating the simpering grace of Crébillon he did so with care and a certain amount of affectation; but such missives were not the ordinary weapons he used in order to bring his enterprises, or shall we say certain enterprises, to a successful issue.

Before leaving Europe, before deceiving Kings and Governments, he was a past master in the art of tying and unravelling the knots of amorous diplomacy. He loved a woman as long as it suited him, and when he dismissed her from his presence he had the supreme

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talent of preserving as his friend the one who had been his lover.

Of all his victories on the fields of love, the one most grateful to his soul was undoubtedly that which he achieved the day he met the Comtesse de Flahaut, so pure in her romanesque conceptions, so retiring in her manner, so sympathetic, so sweet in her nature.

On that night the Abbé Maurice was in a lively mood, and his conversation was most engaging. The good lady could not but wish him well. At the very first blush, she felt that to her he was more than a stranger. No doubt she had learnt from other women that she should be on her guard with a wooer whose words, though not conveying sincerity, possessed the dread power of persuasion. All her resolutions were dashed to the ground in the presence of the gay enchanter. From the start he affected towards her an attentive and respectful manner which he did not always display towards other women. He was seduced by her laughing ways, her air of meekness, and her physical attractions. She was not marvellously handsome, but had a pleasant, witty, graceful face, a natural gaiety, which enabled her to appreciate a light story of love if lightly told in delicate, guarded, and witty terms. She had many other attractions, those qualities born of intuition and of that special education enjoyed by most intelligent women, which tends to develop their faculties of divination, their resourcefulness, and their natural aptitude for diplomacy. All this and more he discovered in the heart of this attractive young woman, whose tender leanings and inclinations had so far only been satisfied by the possession of a highly respectable but rather ancient husband. Talleyrand's visits to her house became more and more frequent. It was a rendezvous for fashionable society, and that alone would have justified his presence there. The heart of Madame de Flahaut did not actually fall into the net of the Abbé

de Périgord. It fluttered into it of its own accord. He now courted her openly, and, of course, gossip was rife, especially in the *salon* of the Baronne de Staël.¹ He still frequented it assiduously, as he had done the *salon* of Necker, because there he met a witty, eloquent, and passionate young woman, surrounded by men of great merit, whose conversation enlightened all those capable of reflection or enthusiasm. From the very first she had recognised his merits. The brave and calm demeanour which he preserved at all times, his thoughts and sentiments which he knew were diametrically opposed to her fiery, passionate, and impulsive nature, won her over and imbued her with a certain amount of confidence in his moral character. There was more coquetry than confidence in her friendship for him. She knew that this cold and ironical man could only listen to what interested him, and that her poetic effusions could never convey to him the treasures hidden in her soul. While neglecting no means of pleasing him, she always felt a certain amount of restless anxiety when he was present, a feeling quite novel to her who was accustomed to hold her audience spell-bound by her eloquence. It was thus that Delphine,² who was the real prototype of Madame de Staël in her youth (just as Corinne was her ideal), always postponed until the morrow the unburdening of her soul to the enigmatic Madame de Vernon, the feminine impersonation of Talleyrand. He went to her house, as he would go to a theatre, full of admiration for the able way in which she spoke on every subject in a most vivid, poetic, and animated manner. During the whole evening he would remain contemplating her as she enthralled the intellectual élite which revolved in her dazzling orb. Her conversation was as keen as a wrestling-match, as impetuous as an assault-at-arms, as ardent as a deadly encounter. It created a strange impression,

¹ The former Madame Necker, whose *poursuivant* Talleyrand had been for some time.

² *Delphine* was the heroine and the title of Madame de Staël's best novel.

for all this strife disturbed his calm powers of reasoning, and he often retired in search of rest, which was afforded to him as often as possible in the pursuit of other conversations of a quieter and more peaceful nature, the feminine charms of which were by far the keener. Men have always preferred to be seduced by such charms than ruled by other influences. He gradually forsook the *salon* of Madame de Staël, where women were scarce,¹ for that of Madame de Flahaut.

He was a daily caller at the apartments of the old Louvre, and there he neglected no opportunity of directing the conversation to such subjects as are usually discussed *en tête-à-tête*. His visits to "Delphine" were now few and far between, for he felt that this inspired woman kindled too many flames, possessed too much genius, and displayed too great a wealth of sentiment. He would willingly have repeated the words of the novel, "The songs heard in this haven are too pure for our ears." He breathed more freely with Madame de Flahaut, whose coin of wit was of a lighter currency. Notwithstanding her prestige, Madame de Staël took umbrage at his defection. This was pure feminine weakness on the part of a woman who, not being beautiful, was aware of the fact and weak enough to take it to heart.²

Talleyrand, the great expert in feminine beauty, saw at a glance that the brilliancy of genius was the one and only beauty possessed by Germaine Necker, whose nose and mouth were both defective, but whose eyes alone awakened interest in her features. Her lovely eyes expressed with consummate eloquence her lofty and energetic thoughts. Her hands, too, were beautiful, and woman-like she displayed them to the best possible advantage! This latter fact

¹ Madame de Staël did not care for the society of women, to whom she could not express her ideas with any hope of reciprocity. She was at her best in the company of able men, who could kindle her imagination, understand it, and fence with it.

² Many of Madame de Staël's contemporary and posthumous admirers declared that she was divinely pretty.

did not escape his notice. Madame de Staël had the habit of twisting between her fingers a poplar twig, with two or three leaves, the rustling of which was a necessary accompaniment to her words. To captivate the hearts and minds of her admirers as she spoke was her supreme ambition, and, thanks to the poplar branch, she effected her purpose by making the best use of her shapely hands. Talleyrand ceased to listen to her with rapt attention when he became engaged in other conversations with a second Muse.¹

The two women knew each other, for they met in the same social circles, and were admired and courted by the same men. Ségur Chastellux and Governor Morris paid homage to both ladies, who equally appreciated the private commerce of great minds. But they vied with one another for the possession of Talleyrand, and in this duel the woman of genius lost ground inch by inch, and was defeated by a witty, lovable woman who knew instinctively that she should win the day. Madame de Staël decided to elicit the truth once and for all. She told M. de Périgord that he must choose between her rival and herself, but so cleverly did he fence with her that she said :

“ Now confess frankly that if she and I fell into the river together, you would not save me first.”

“ No, madame,” replied Périgord, “ because you are, no doubt, the better swimmer of the two.”

It was no easy task to entrap Talleyrand. He kissed Madame de Staël's hand and drove straight to Madame de Flahaut's. He remained by her side, dining and supping daily at her house, where he met the choicest company. Some of his love affairs had been shaped and unshaped with the rapidity of a desire which flits, once satisfied, but his relations with Madame de Flahaut endured for a long time. For several years

¹ Madame de Flahaut could also talk, think, and write. Her talents did not soar to the height of those of Madame de Staël, whose books dealt with lofty matter expressed in virile terms, but she possessed a style, both graceful and refined, which is a woman's appanage.

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the icebergs of old age had held the Comte de Flahaut aloof from all conjugal felicity. Invoking the combined rights of youth and love, Talleyrand urged his quest and pleaded for her favours. Madame de Flahaut yielded to his prayer, and as a result there was an accident, the authorship of which was credited to the "Bishop." Well-informed people asserted that Charles-Joseph de Flahaut de La Billarderie, born on the 21st of April, 1785, was the fruit of the assiduous attentions bestowed by M. de Périgord upon the Comtesse. Governor Morris had no doubts about this matter, and his information must have been fairly accurate, inasmuch as he too was an ardent postulant who knelt in vain at the same shrine. Monsieur d'Angiviller, the lady's brother-in-law and the superintendent of the royal palaces, was equally positive of a fact to which Talleyrand testified in the fullest way. He watched the early years of the child with discreet affection, and took the greatest interest in his subsequent career, though naturally unable to declare his paternal love. Charles de Flahaut constantly visited Talleyrand. In later years he had another frequent visitor, in the person of young Auguste de Morny, whose birth was due to the "natural" tenderness of the Emperor's aide-de-camp. The Bishop often supped with the Comtesse and their son in her apartments at the Louvre. Talleyrand's presence had now become a common factor in the daily life of Madame de Flahaut. She suffered tortures if he was late in coming, and when he came unawares she seemed to walk on air. She betrayed her feelings to him with too much candour. He sought the love of women more by taste than by temperament, but he refused to be dominated by them. He felt that his liberty was being interfered with as the threads of affection were woven tighter round his heart. Little by little he began to loosen them. He became forgetful, absent-minded, and soon the sweet authoress of *Adèle de Senanges* was but the object of his intellectual esteem and respectful consideration. At first she wept bitterly, but gradually

accepted her fate with resignation.¹ He now returned to Madame de Staël, whose moral and political influence had greatly increased. Her life was still spent in a state of constant agitation, her existence was a whirlwind, but calm people often feel happy in the company of excitable natures, for they can always obtain a hold upon them. Talleyrand had long since learnt the art of insinuating himself into the good graces of those who could foster his ambition. From his early age he thirsted and hungered for honours, but was clever enough to conceal the fact. From the onset he felt that he was predestined to direct the affairs of men, to shape their fates, and to impose his will upon them. To the pursuance of this end he tended all his efforts. No sooner had he been appointed Agent-General to the clergy than he realised the importance of his position, and decided to extend his sphere of action. But we must now retrace our steps in the narrative of his career which we mean to study from its inception.

The ecclesiastical province of Tours appointed the Abbé de Périgord on the 10th of May, 1780. The Abbé Thomas de Boisgelin, cousin of the Cardinal Archbishop, had been appointed on the 4th of January in the same year, but he was too much absorbed by his great passion for Madame de Cavanac to devote much time to the discharge of his duties. An indolent man born tired, he willingly handed over to the Abbé de Périgord the whole control of the office. He was satisfied to bask all day upon a sofa, sighing for his lady-love, but his inaction met with the full approval of the clergy. While Talley-

¹ The feelings of Madame de Flahaut towards her "Bishop" had also decreased in strength and warmth before she was forsaken. On the 17th of August, 1789, Governor Morris was happy to recognise the fact when he wrote :

"For the first time she dropped one word which almost expressed contempt for him. I will and I shall divorce her completely from him, but to do so seems unfair, because he is the father of her child. The secret reason of the lady's coolness towards him resides in the fact that he sadly lacks the *fortiter in re*, though abundantly provided with the *suaviter in modo*."

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rand administered the huge wealth of the Church, M. de Boisgelin¹ trusted entirely to his colleague, whose merits he fully recognised, and continued to enjoy life in the company of Madame de Cavanac. She had much to relate to him concerning the present and the past. Had she not, as Mademoiselle de Romans at the Court of Louis XV, in the first blush of her youth, jeopardised the position of Mme de Pompadour by very nearly becoming the Royal favourite? This was due to the influence she had acquired over the King by presenting him with a son, whom His Majesty almost recognised as such. The child was a source of joy, and the cause of its mother's unfeigned glory. As she walked with him in the garden of the Tuileries, an inquisitive crowd would often follow in her footsteps, gazing at the lovely boy, and she would say, "Oh, ladies and gentlemen, I pray you do not impede the progress of His Majesty's son."² M. de Boisgelin listened complacently to the story of Madame de Cavanac's early love affairs, and he esteemed her all the more for relating them so frankly. He lingered happily in the company of this beautiful and captivating woman, whose dark tresses were profuse and ample enough to veil her whole body. In the meanwhile, M. de Talleyrand, himself an active lover in his spare moments, was investing the millions of Mother Church to the best advantage.³ It is true that he was also helped by others in his task. He could always find sufficient leisure to indulge in his amorous fancies and perform all his social duties. In the early stages of his career Talleyrand did not pursue an easy course such as may be in-

¹ This Abbé de Boisgelin was one of the first victims of the French Revolution in September, 1792.

² He was christened "Bourbon," a favour which was never granted to any other illegitimate children of Louis XV. The boy became the Abbé de Bourbon.

³ His coadjutors were Charles Monnay, the future Bishop of Troyes, the Abbé Bourlier, who became Bishop of Evreux; Jean Baptiste Duvoisin, promoter of the Arch Diocese, Vicar-General of Laon, who eventually became Bishop of Nantes, and the Abbé des Renaudes, who became Talleyrand's confidential man until he left his service to join that of Maret, the Secretary of State, to whom he rendered eminent services.



M. DE TALLEYRAND
(From a miniature by Isabey)

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dulged by those whose name is already made. He devoted his efforts and all his energy to the performance of his duties, knowing that by discharging them satisfactorily he would curry favour among those who could promote him. He felt that by laying a solid foundation, and building up a reputation for intrinsic merit, he would in later years be able to enjoy life to his full content. He farmed the interests of the Clergy with signal success, and added to his official duties a considerable amount of work which he undertook for the public benefit. He spared no trouble and displayed the utmost zeal, though in years to come he was wont to deprecate every display of zeal.¹ His friends smiled at his energy and excused it on the ground of his youth, convinced that in time he would recover from this acute attack of unseemly energy. His pursuits in private life were as frivolous as ever, but they were ignored by his superiors, who gave him to understand that his efforts would be duly crowned as soon as he had the chance of exercising his talents in a wider sphere. The clergy openly testified to the services which he had rendered, and he thus received the moral and material rewards which he had duly earned. His influence and social relations increased with a bound. Through a series of happy coincidences, he became acquainted with people of the first rank, such as the de Maurepas, whose comet had many satellites, said Madame de Rochefort. He also frequented Turgot, Lamoignon, Malesherbes, the Marshal de Castries, as well as State Councillors of the second rank. All was grist to his mill, and he was only too glad to cultivate the germs of opportunity until such time as it would mature. His plans were

¹ His successor as Agent-General was the Abbé de Montesquiou, who became Minister under Louis XVIII, and greatly helped Talleyrand in preparing the return of the Bourbon dynasty. He was a prelate of the old régime, slightly tainted with sentimental philosophy, but only very slightly. He did not realise that the history of the world could have begun before the feudal times. As he strolled one day in his gardens at Saint Germain, he said to those around him, "The life we lead here is not natural. The natural life of men in our position is to live in their castles surrounded by their vassals."

well set, and he kept them well hidden. He applied himself diligently to the study of the needs and aspirations of his time. His vast intelligence shed a keen light upon everything he heard and learnt in the company of men whose careers were to be almost as brilliant as his own. With them he discussed the conditions of human life and the existing relations between the different countries of Europe. He foresaw radical and sorely needed changes in the internal administration of the kingdom, and he strongly favoured the suppression of provincial councils, because he knew that they represented the source of all wealth. In his comfortable residence in the Rue de Bellechasse they forgathered to discuss these weighty matters, while drinking his famous cups of chocolate. The company was young, ardent, brilliant, and ambitious, and each morning his breakfast-room was crowded with the coming men of France. Lauzun, Louis de Narbonne, and de Choiseul-Gouffier brought tidings of fashion and society. Mirabeau and Rulhière, the academician, discussed philosophy and politics. Questions of finance, administration, and commerce were dwelt upon by such economists as Panchaud and Dupont de Nemours, while semi-scientists like Bailliès, Choiseul, and the Abbé de Périgord confined themselves to generalities. The same group of thinkers often repaired to the residence of the Comte de Choiseul at Mont Parnasse.

During the autumn of 1786 the treaty of commerce, just concluded between France and England, was the principal question under discussion.¹ At this early date Talleyrand was already an advocate of free commercial transactions, and took the deepest interest in this treaty. His economic discussions did not monopolise the whole time of Talleyrand and his guests, who did not neglect art, literature, and social subjects.

¹ This treaty had been drafted by the Comte de Vergennes, and by Calonne. Its object was to put a stop to contraband, and, by means of customs, to provide the treasury with a revenue derived from such moderate duties as would practically starve out smugglers, whose profit would cease to be worth having.

He occasionally remembered that he was a Priest who hoped to be a Bishop, and who should soon make this fact known. So great was his success as a fashionable preacher that a critic summed him up in the following way: "He dresses like a fop, thinks like a Deist, and preaches like an angel." We must take all this for granted, as not one of his sermons has been handed down to posterity. He was eventually appointed to the diocese of Autun. It was only a living of 22,000 francs,¹ but the See was an ancient and influential one, the stepping-stone to the Archbishopric of Lyons. As far back as 1784, his ambition soared much higher. He had been promised a diocese on the recommendation of the Comtesse de Brionne,² whose petition to the Holy See was strongly endorsed by Gustave III, the Lutheran ruler of Sweden. Talleyrand had almost obtained the coveted hat, but it was snatched from him at the last moment by Marie Antoinette, who strongly opposed his nomination. For years later

¹ £880 a year.

² On the 20th of August, 1784, the Comtesse de Brionne had written the following letter to the King of Sweden :

"Sire,

"Your Majesty has afforded me untold happiness by allowing me to write confidentially to a Sovereign I admire. Your goodness further urged you to plant immense gratitude in my heart and to rivet me to you through the kindness you have shown me. I am now about to use the permission which your Majesty granted me by seeking a service from your august person in behalf of the Abbé de Périgord. I am emboldened to do so on account of his birth, his personal qualities, and the remarkable talent which has already earned for him the recognition of his Body. Your Majesty alone is aware of my earnest wishes, and it is most important that no one here should know of his desire for promotion, or of the kind Offices which you are about to render him. Such knowledge would set loose envy, jealousy, and bring about such consequences as follow in the wake of personal enmities. I shall not move in the matter until I hear that Your Majesty has actually consented to convey to the Pope the wish that Monsieur l'Abbé de Périgord should receive a Cardinal's hat at the hands of His Holiness. Then, and only then, shall he take the necessary steps to obtain leave from his King and Queen to solicit the said hat. This will be readily granted by them, for they have shown much favour to his family. I rely, however, upon the engagements which Your Majesty has been good enough to enter into with me. I will inform you, Sire, of the result of the Abbé's behest, and I will not ask Your Majesty to write to Rome until the said permission has been granted by my Sovereigns. I again beseech of Your Majesty not to impart my secret to a living being."

similar difficulties had to be overcome before he was appointed Bishop. He had afforded but scanty proofs of his piety, careful though he was to safeguard appearances. However great his discretion, it was publicly known that he had transgressed the limits of indulgence, at least of that clerical indulgence which was usually granted to young noblemen. It was notorious that under the Ministry of Calonne he had made vast sums through his personal relations with this financier by means of shady speculations, and that he left the thieves' den with considerable booty. The King's sanction was postponed on account of the candidate's gambling habits and of the cool impertinence with which he advertised his many liaisons. The same reasons which deprived the Abbé de Périgord of the Archbishopric of Bourges very nearly cost him the Bishopric of Autun. His friends pleaded for him daily, and worthy Prelates humbly prayed that the Sovereign might soon grant him a See as a well-earned reward for such eminent services as he had rendered to the Church during his tenure of office as Agent-General. They pleaded mercy and forgiveness for his sins of youth and for the irregularities of his private life, which they ascribed to human weakness. They bore solemn testimony to his orthodoxy and recalled a collective letter to the Pope drawn up and signed by him, in which he described the pangs of sorrows inflicted upon Holy Mother Church by the almost total cessation of monastic life in France. They reminded the Sovereign that their candidate had inveighed with zeal and ability against the baneful influence of anti-religious writing, and that he had displayed much religious fervour by asking the Holy Father not to delay the beatification of Sister Marie of the Incarnation, a Carmelite Nun, and of Alain de Solminiac, the venerable Bishop of Cahors. Notwithstanding all these recommendations, Louis XVI could not overcome his dislike of a sceptical priest, worldly to a degree and passionately devoted to such pagan pastimes as love and gambling. He was finally won over by the paternal intercession of the Comte

Charles-Daniel de Talleyrand-Périgord, who was dangerously ill at the time. So it happened that the Church of France and the inhabitants of the Province of Autun were informed that His Majesty the King had granted the Bishopric of Autun to Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, Vicar-General of Reims, on the 22nd day of the month of November, 1788. It was further stated in the Royal warrant that the King had been pleased to make this appointment because he was conversant with the moral life, the piety and all the other virtues and commendable qualities possessed by the Bishop-elect. His Lordship was created a prelate of the first class and entrusted with the spiritual administration of a diocese. Henceforth his insignia were the crozier, the mitre, the ring, and the pectoral cross. It was fondly hoped that he would become one of the leading lights of the Church.

In accordance with established rules, the Abbé de Périgord went into retreat at the Seminary of Issy for a period of meditation and self-denial previous to being anointed Bishop. The Abbé Duclaux, who had known him as a student and was now one of the Directors of Saint-Sulpice, was entrusted with the task of preparing the mind and heart of Talleyrand for his exalted calling. The good Abbé declared, with the sincerity of his simple faith, that he had never undertaken such a difficult task. On many occasions he had to interrupt his pious lessons just as he thought his pupil was following him carefully in his earnest exhortations. His wise and urgent advice to give up all frivolous temptations and to understand the responsibilities incumbent upon a Bishop were rudely checked by the invasion of the neophyte's visitors, who came to rescue and deliver him from such serious and trying thoughts. The new episcopal neophyte always afforded them the warmest greeting, for the head which was soon to wear a mitre was still filled with worldly thoughts.

The ceremony took place on the 16th of January, in the little Seminary of the Holy Saviour. He was consecrated Bishop by Louis-André de Grimaldi, Lord Bishop of

Noyon, assisted by Aimard-Claude de Nicolaï, Bishop of Béziers, and by Louis-Martin de Chaumont de la Galaisière, Bishop of Saint-Dié. He had invited neither friends nor relations. The Abbé Hugon, a Sulpician Father who served as his acolyte, afterwards related that the behaviour of M. de Périgord was anything but proper. He was haughty and callous, and on the Saturday following the consecration, the said Abbé Hugon had to state in confession that he had entertained serious doubts concerning the Bishop's faith.¹

The pastoral letter sent by Monseigneur d'Autun on the 26th of January, 1789, to the regular and secular Clergy and to all his faithful, was nevertheless a most edifying document couched in terms of the greatest sanctity. Thanks to the Holy God and to the Holy See, the noble Lord was now a mighty prelate and his feudal titles were enhanced by the spiritual attributions conferred on him through his recent promotion. He was not only Bishop of Autun, but first Suffragant of the Arch-Diocese of Lyons, Life-President of the States of Burgundy, and also Count of Saulieu, Baron of Issy-l'Évêque, Luçay, Grosme, and Bouillon. He therefore deemed it fit and proper to live upon a footing worthy of his exalted state. He first purchased a beautiful coach, the bill of which remained due for a long time. He amused his friends by repeating the answer made by him to his coach-builder, who humbly asked when he might expect the favour of a settlement :

“ My dear fellow, you must not be so inquisitive.”

He eventually settled the account, but he exhibited no more eagerness to use the superb equipage for visiting his faithful flock than he had done in paying for its purchase.

In his pastoral letter he quoted St. Paul to the Romans, when he wrote : “ My friends, I yearn to see you.” This was but a figure of speech, for his visit to the faith-

¹ M. Hugon made this statement to Ernest Renan, the famous author of *The Life of Jesus*, when he entered the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice. Renan, too, was trained for the priesthood, though he became the most famous of agnostics.

ful of Autun seemed indefinitely postponed. He administered his diocese from afar, having instructed one Simon, the Choirmaster of the Cathedral, to take up his residence in the Bishop's house. He then appointed his staff, consisting of the two Vicars-General, who had served under his predecessor, several others nominated by himself, besides a private secretary and two or three subordinates. He was absorbed in Paris by politics, business, and social ties. The increasing difficulties in home affairs were held by him to be the symptoms of an imminent and violent change in the institutions of the country. The relations between the Throne and the Nation had become strangely complicated during the past few years. In 1787 Louis XVI had had to convene the Assembly of Notables because the funds of the Treasury were almost exhausted. Dissatisfaction was rife among all classes. Parliament and the whole nation were saturated with new ideas, and the mere intention of upholding authority was looked upon as the proof of servile obedience. That France was rapidly becoming tired of the Master for whom she had lost all respect, was amply proved by many other indications.

So far, this state of things had not yet given rise to much anxiety. Men and women at Court had grown so accustomed to gaze on one another, that they still thought they were witnessing a play. Monsieur, the King's brother, spent his time solving riddles and enigmas. His brother flitted from his house in the Rue d'Artois to Bel-Air, his country box, or to Bagatelle, the head-quarters of his gallant exploits. They were happily unconscious of the fact that the Throne and Altar were tottering, that the Nation was ready to fly to arms, and that the nobility had but a short spell in which to enjoy its unbounded privileges. The verses of the Abbé de Boufflers or the cost of maintaining a fashionable beauty were still the subjects of grave debate. Heedless and happy men and women of society discussed and commented upon philosophical systems conceived in the clouds which, though apparently humanitarian, sapped

all the bases of moral and political order. The highest-born women took part in these debates, hoping, no doubt, that they would not have to run the same risks as men. When the popular ebullition first made itself felt, a slight shudder of fear shook the governing classes. It lasted but a short time, for they consoled themselves with the thought that they could soon mate the people. They felt sure that Necker would lay hands upon sufficient funds to carry on the Government of the country, and that both Commons and common folk would once more prove submissive and passively obedient to the will of their masters. The crown was about to summon the States-General. What more could be expected of its indulgence? What was the use of such an Assembly if it could not devise a remedy for all these evils? With such comforting thoughts the aristocracy pursued its gay and heedless course.

The King and Queen did not feel so reassured. Their reign had been inaugurated by festivities and by the union of hearts. At the onset they felt somewhat apprehensive because of their youth, but their fears were soon dispelled in the midst of popular ovations and testimonies of affection which were to be followed so quickly by cries of anger and revolt. The intoxication of the early days had turned to sullen hatred. The Queen trembled as she realised the full strength of the wave of unpopularity which was lashing the steps of her Throne. She had bestowed favours, both excessive and undeserved, upon her favourites.¹ Her actions were bitterly resented at Court, in Paris, and eventually by the whole Nation. She had been guilty of certain imprudences of conduct which were grossly exaggerated by her slanderous enemies.² She had indulged in dangerous friendships, such as those of the Princesse de Lamballe and of the

¹ The Comte de Mercy states in his *Mémoires* that the Polignac family had never rendered any services to the State, but had secured, through favours, offices and incomes amounting to seven hundred thousand francs a year.

² The libels and slanders spoken and written about her from 1785 to 1788 gave rise to the accusations brought against Marie Antoinette by the Revolutionary tribunal in 1793 (La Marck).

Duchesse de Polignac, and made many mistakes, due to the baneful influence of the Comte d'Artois. She had been guilty of graver errors, such as the pursuance of her Austrian policy and her ill-fated intervention in State matters. Other causes, real or fictitious, had completely altered the feelings with which Marie Antoinette, Dauphine and Queen, had been greeted at the onset.¹ She had ceased to be loved, and was now hated to such an extent that every act committed or inspired by her was universally condemned. The end of this reign was darkened by the misery of the people, the insolvency of the Treasury, and by countless risings. Louis XVI, defeated by the opposition, was compelled to abrogate the decisions of his Councils, to proclaim the liberty of the Press, and to summon the States-General on the 27th of April, 1789.

The coming elections caused great excitement throughout France and the Provinces. The Electors were invited by letter to exercise their rights. Talleyrand, who had not changed his mode of living since he became a Bishop, was summoned by the grand Bailiff² of the Province of Autun to enter a personal appearance before the Assembly of his order. He quickly saw the chance afforded him of being returned by his diocese as a member of the States-General, and until he was elected, Paris knew him not. The famous episcopal coach was soon on its way to Autun, which was reached on the 12th of March. His coming had been duly heralded. He arrived on a Sunday morning to the sound of the church bells, which had been pealing since dawn. The streets were full of people, and vast crowds witnessed the processions of Canons who came to accompany his Lordship from his Palace to the Cathedral. Monseigneur de Talleyrand, surrounded by his Vicars-General, awaited them in his

¹ Her mother, the Empress Marie Thérèse, forewarned by her maternal instinct, wrote to her: "My child, for Heaven's sake, be prudent; the thought of your future makes me shudder."

² Comte de Gramont.

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episcopal robes. He then took the oath in a stentorian voice and gave many solemn promises which were never fulfilled. As soon as the religious ceremonies were over, he began his political campaign, sparing no pains to win the friendship of his flock, composed as it was of his future constituents. He inquired into the wants of one and all, visited all his parishes, and pursued a skilful system of propaganda, all the more telling as he assumed the part of a devout ecclesiastic. He displayed much zeal and fervour in the administration of his diocese, and found time to create a favourable impression by presiding over religious ceremonies and services. He could even spare a few moments for solitary prayer in one or other shrine of his city, and, strange to say, all these proofs of humble piety soon became known to all. It was most edifying to see him each morning reading his Office or meditating in the gardens of the Palace. He soon won the universal sympathy and intense gratitude of his clergy, who were daily invited to partake of the exquisite dinners prepared by his Paris *chef*. He proved himself an excellent Bishop and an excellent candidate. His political programme, to which we shall refer later, met with the full approval of his clergy, and on the 2nd of April he was nominated parliamentary candidate of the clergy of the Province of Autun by an enormous majority. Having achieved the desired result, he declared that he was imperatively recalled to Paris. He left Autun on Easter Sunday, the 12th of April, without taking part in any religious service. On that very day an ecclesiastical retreat began in the Diocese, but he took no heed of it. Autun saw him no more.¹

¹ It has been stated that he did return there at the beginning of August, 1790, under strange circumstances, which we relate without vouching for the authenticity of the present story.

The Bishop was musing one morning, in his Palace of Autun, upon the uncertain future in store for religion and the monarchy. Suddenly he heard a great noise, the discordant yells of a delirious crowd. He instructed his secretary, the Abbé Gouttes, to find out the cause of the disturbance (it was this same Abbé Gouttes whom he appointed Bishop of Saône-et-Loire on the 3rd of April, 1791, with a view to making him his successor at Autun). The Abbé was a timorous soul, fearful lest the leaders of a riotous crowd might pour insult upon his

dignity. Although the railings round it were rudely shaken by a thousand frantic hands, it was not the intention of the crowd to pull down the Bishop's house. The actual presence of the Bishop alone was needed, because he was called upon to exorcise a poor wretch supposed to be possessed by the devil. The peasants who had seized him and brought him into the town insisted that the Bishop should rid them of such a curse, and in the meanwhile they struck their prisoner mercilessly. Monsieur de Talleyrand stood at an open window and declared that he would perform forthwith the service of exorcism. He would dearly have liked to sum it up in two or three Latin phrases delivered in his private Oratory, but the infuriated crowd insisted that the ceremony should take place in the chapel. Alas! the chapel had not been used since the new Bishop had been enthroned. It was full of furniture and packing cases. He then suggested to the deputation the advisability of exorcising the man upon the footsteps of the Palace, in the presence of all assembled. This was agreed to, and he stood mitred, with crozier in hand, while the sorcerer knelt before him, trembling with fear, his hair on end, haggard and distraught. As he was about to raise his sacrilegious though consecrated hand, he saw that his acolyte had no Holy Water. He sent someone over to the Cathedral, where there was none, then to the Church of Saint Laurent, but alas, with a similar result. The Comtesse d'Arlon, a pious, but bigoted woman, refused to lend Holy Water to a constitutional prelate, but at last some of the precious liquid was found in the house of a poor woman. The long delay excited the hilarity of those present. The incident ended in a most tragic manner. As the Bishop was about to sprinkle the possessed one, and thus rid him of the evil spirit, the poor fellow fell dead at his feet, done to death by the violence of an infuriated and superstitious mob. The Bishop almost fainted, and dropped his pastoral wand, which rolled down the steps. The ancient city of Augustodunum long remembered this weird incident, but Talleyrand never referred to it.

CHAPTER III

TALLEYRAND AND THE REVOLUTION

The National Assembly—The King and the Revolution—Talleyrand and Mirabeau—A slight misunderstanding between the two great men—The period of 1789—Important part played by Talleyrand—His return to the "Constituante"—The famous debate upon the alienation of Church property, which drew upon the head of Talleyrand the indignant fulminations of the whole Clergy—His popularity in Paris—The feast of the federation and the celebration of Mass on the Champ-de-Mars—Talleyrand's relations with the Clergy of Saône-et-Loire after he had voted in favour of the civil Constitution being applied to all Priests—How these relations ended eventually—He resigns the Bishopric of Autun—The late Prelate and mighty Lord becomes a Deputy and a diplomatist—His two missions to England—Arduous negotiations—The Brion incident—How all the results so laboriously achieved were negatived on the 10th of August—Talleyrand's explanations in Paris—His third departure to London—Some details concerning his intimate life and social relations in the English capital: the emigrants belonging to his party—His pleasant sojourn in Surrey, the Colony of Jupiter Hall—Life becomes less easy in London—The threatened Alien Bill—Decree of expulsion—Talleyrand's enforced departure for Philadelphia.

THE dawn of Talleyrand's political career coincided with that of the French Revolution. Though he joined issue with that fraction of the Clergy which had met at Tours in quest of innovations, he had awaited events expectantly, acting as usual with the greatest prudence. Neither his instincts, his education, nor his tastes could make him favour Revolution. At the most he was a moderate Liberal through sheer common sense. As soon as the States-General came into existence, he strongly opposed the reunion of the different social orders and the granting of common powers to them. At the very inception of the debate, he grew apprehensive, owing to the excited condition of public opinion. He warned Louis XVI and the Princes that this excitement would eventually culminate into frenzy. In the course

of several midnight interviews with the Comte d'Artois, he conjured him to speak to the King with firmness, to expose to him all the dangers of the present and future situations, and to urge him while it was yet time to dissolve the States-General and to appeal a second time to the country, but under different conditions of election. In the same train of thought he conceived and wrote out a plan with the object of saving Louis XVI from the hands of the mob. He entrusted it to the Comte d'Artois, who placed it before the King, but the King took fright and did not act.¹ It was then that Talleyrand began to discharge his last obligations towards the Throne and towards the Altar. He said to the brother of Louis, "If the King chooses to lose himself, I shall not lose myself with him."²

He followed events with great circumspection, expressing his opinions with such prudence and in such terms as could always be modified according to circumstances. He expressed himself in favour of a constitutional monarchy, without stating, however, that he was disposed to make any sacrifices in favour of one, whether that of Louis XVI or Philippe-Egalité. The pressure of public opinion became so great that he soon found himself compelled to adopt an attitude of a more definite nature. Nothing henceforth could stop the progress of the Revolution or stay the elements from which it derived its strength. It was indispensable to swim with the current in order to have any hand or part in the conduct of public affairs. Writers have bitterly reproached Talleyrand for having

¹ Soon after the arrest of Varennes, Madame de Staël foresaw the horrors of the coming 10th of August, and towards the middle of 1792, she drew up a plan of escape from the Tuileries. She left it in the keeping of the Comte de Montmorin. Her advice was not heeded.

² In the course of his last interview, the Comte d'Artois informed him that it was the King's firm intention to yield sooner than shed a drop of blood by suppressing the popular movement. To this, Talleyrand replied, "If that is so, I shall leave France to-morrow."

"Then, Monsieur, we are now compelled to look after our own interests, since the King and the Princes have neglected those of the monarchy as well as their own."

"That is my advice to you, sir. Whatever happens, I can never blame you, and you can always depend on my true friendship."

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followed this course. They did so long after peace had been restored. It was hardly reasonable to expect, however, that he would remain quiescent with arms extended to heaven, in an attitude of dumb prayer, so as to avoid reproaches in the future. Instead of adopting such a course, he took advantage of the first open door he found, and slipped through it, primed with ambition and with talents which were to raise him to the first rank. Between retiring as a formal protest, and howling with the wolves, he thought it best that his voice, too, should be heard.

The impending shocks of the coming Revolution were consecutive. It would have been as difficult to foresee their number as to determine their duration.

"We are going to have a Revolution," said someone to M. Du Pange, when the numbers of the Third Estate were increased to a total of fifteen hundred deputies.

"One Revolution, did you say?" replied Du Pange. "You mean fifteen hundred Revolutions. '*Tot capita, tot tempestates*'" (As many heads, as many storms).

The nation conceived great hopes, and welcomed the lofty ideas of 1789 as heralding the advent of a new religion. The States-General had already been transformed into the "Assemblée Constituante," in which Talleyrand made his first speeches. He sketched with perfect clearness and great foresight the reforms and improvements which he deemed necessary if the political situation of France was to be bettered. These reforms had been clearly and forcibly proposed by him in his address to the Electors of Autun. They were eventually placed on the statute book by successive Constitutional Governments. Many years after Talleyrand had written his views upon "The General Affairs of the Nation," Lord Bulwer-Lytton declared that the annals of history did not contain a more remarkable example of human prudence or of accurate judgment.

He had inveighed against imperative mandates, and predicated the British system of transferring all powers to responsible Ministers of the Crown. He was twice summoned to the Constitutional Committee. He submitted to it reports drafted in a philosophical sense, and in such a graceful manner that they might have emanated from the pen of Chamfort. The Abbé Desrenaudes undoubtedly helped him with them, though Talleyrand was well able to do so alone. His thoughts and acts were never disturbed or hurried in any way. Under all conditions he remained master of himself and maintained his cool demeanour. Foreseeing men watched his career with the greatest interest from its very inception. Chauderlos de Laclos wrote thus of him: "He will reach the summit because he grasps all such opportunities as come in shoals to him who does not bully or jostle fate and fortune." The prophet was not mistaken.

Talleyrand had now reached the age of thirty-five. His reasoning powers were ripe and had acquired great strength in the course of his second youth. His authority grew daily in the National Assembly, for he had sufficient sense to put his plans into effect, and sufficient sentiment to grow attached to them. He did not impose his presence upon the "Constituante" by any boisterous displays, but made it felt by the interjection of one word, one phrase, essentially his own.

During the course of a stormy debate he sometimes crossed swords with Mirabeau, then the dominating factor of the Assembly. The two adversaries were face to face, the one turbulent and self-asserting, the other calm and phlegmatic.

"I will soon hold you in a vicious circle," exclaimed Mirabeau.

"Do you wish to embrace me, then?" said the Bishop of Autun, who did not himself pose as a paragon of virtue.

There was a period of coolness, not to say a complete rupture, between these two men, who had so many views,

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so many talents in common. Mirabeau had lost his temper with Talleyrand, and spoken to him in very rude terms.¹

The misunderstanding was but a passing one, for the two men were soon reconciled, thanks to the fact that they held identical views upon all questions of home and foreign politics. When the eminent orator was struck down in the midst of the strife, and that death had seized upon this noble prey, he chose Talleyrand and the Comte de Lamarck as his executors. On the 4th of February, 1791, it was to Talleyrand that he read his last speech upon the subject of public instruction. A memorandum found among his papers proves that it was his intention to raise Talleyrand to Cabinet rank, if he succeeded in bridling the excesses of the Revolutionary Party by effecting an alliance with the King's partisans. This attempted fusion with the Royalist party that had grown somewhat stronger and a democracy muzzled in its attempt to develop the progress of national institutions was doomed to utter failure. The compact was actually signed and the money paid into the hands of Mirabeau. Talleyrand was quite prepared to follow the evolution which had thus begun. The whole scheme fell to the ground, owing to the death of Mirabeau and to the unhappy intervention of La Fayette, a second-rate personality who, by mere accident, played the part of a first-rate one. As a result, the Jacobin Revolution, which might

¹ Here is the way in which Mirabeau wrote to one of his friends about him :

“ Paris, Rue Sainte-Anne, 28th April, 1787.

“ The infamous conversation of the Abbé de Périgord has made my position intolerable. I enclose the letter which I have written to him. Please peruse and forward it to him, for I am happy to think that this man is unknown to you, as he should be to every honest man in the country. Alas, the stories of my misfortunes have left me at his mercy, and I must act prudently towards this hungry, low, intriguing individual. Mud and money are what he wants. For the sake of money he sold his honour and his friends. For the sake of money he would sell his soul, and would be quite right to do so; through the love of money he would barter his wife for gold.”

Like his terrible father, who was nicknamed “ the friend of men,” Mirabeau could heap insults upon those against whom he had a grudge

have been checked, ran its full and furious course. The fateful days had not dawned when demagogues themselves were to deal deadly blows at that liberty which had just been born.

Many illusions were still harboured in the hearts and minds of men. The period of enthusiasm still endured. In drawing-rooms the sole topics of conversation were the new Constitution, the rights of Citizens, and individual freedom as enjoyed in England. The women devised new systems of Government, while the men made speeches and frequented Clubs. Wits still indulged in puns, for such was the fashion, little knowing the strange influence that was to be wrought when those puns were repeated by other lips. Emigration had just begun. The timid ones sailed forthwith for foreign shores, while many only postponed their departure on account of money matters.

“The soil of Paris burns my feet, but I shall pack up and start as soon as I can ascertain what means I can dispose of.” This was the frank confession of Madame de Normont to a friend.¹

She did not escape in time, however, and was arrested on the 7th Ventôse, year II,² as a noblewoman suspected of maintaining relations with the refugees. She was released on the 12th Vendémiaire, of the year III.³

Beautiful, charming, and elegant women beheld the rising tide without a tremor, and almost tried to swim against it, with the conviction that they as women would be spared. To wit, Madame de Simiane, of the *Comédie française*, who said to an attendant, “Call my lackeys,” to which a passer-by replied, “There are no more lackeys, we are all equal to-day.”

“Well, then, call my brother lackeys,” she retorted.

The Duchesse de Biron was in her box one night

¹ National Archives, W 274, Case No. 59, 4th Part, No. 38.

² “Ventôse” was the sixth month of the Calendar of the first French Republic, from February 19th—March 20th.

³ “Vendémiaire” was the first month of the same Calendar, from September 22nd to October 21st.

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observing in turn the performance on the stage and the riotous behaviour of the pit. The occupants of the ground-floor were ill-disposed towards those of the boxes and the dress circle, and the aristocrats were soon pelted with rotten apples. One of them found its way into the Duchess's lap. She presented it to La Fayette the next day, and said, "This is the first-fruit of the Revolution which has reached me so far." During these events, Talleyrand was content to listen, to study, and to make his way. He soon became an important factor in the National Assembly. Mathieu de Montmorency, the Abbé de Barmond and he, were appointed Secretaries on the 18th of August. On the 31st 200 members recorded their votes in his favour, he having been proposed for the Speakership, without his knowledge. During the succeeding fortnight he became a member of the Constitutional Committee, and his name was the fourth on the list, together with those of Thouret, Siéyès, Target, Desmeuniers, Rabaud Saint-Étienne, Tronchet, and Le Chapelier. He was Mirabeau's predecessor in the presidential chair of the Assembly, and to him was confided the task of reporting to the country upon the conduct and results achieved by its representatives. He did so in his admirable address to the French Nation, which was read before a full House on the 11th of February, 1790.

The cares of public life did not absorb his attention to the extent of making him neglect to satisfy the tastes and foibles of his private life. Combining work with pleasure, he enjoyed social intercourse as long as there was any society left in Paris, and devoted all his leisure hours to his favourite pursuits, women and gambling.

Gambling was Talleyrand's greatest failing. At times in social circles he resorted to it in order to avoid the boredom of certain conversations. He repaired to the green baize when it did not suit him to express

his personal opinions upon such matters as were discussed, but this was by no means the only reason which made him gamble. His own extravagance, especially during the period which preceded his promotion, was really what urged him to tempt fortune, the more so as he was a very lucky player. During the winter of 1790 his profits in a few months amounted to over £30,000, which he won at the Chess Club and in different *salons*. His winnings did not cause him unalloyed pleasure for, strange to relate, this newly fledged legislator felt some remorse at taking his neighbours' moneys. He made a sort of public confession to this effect in a letter which he published in the Press. He stated therein that he was not fond of gambling, or, at any rate, that his fondness for it was a thing of the past. He added that he was quite prepared to give it up since he realised what sufferings were endured and what iniquities were perpetrated on account of this awful vice. He reproached himself bitterly with ever having yielded to its allurements. Now that the reign of virtue had begun throughout the world, he conceived no better way of atoning for his shortcomings than by making a full confession of them. Who would ever have thought that Talleyrand could become such an exemplary penitent? He confessed his faults, we know, but we have yet to learn that he ever restituted one penny of the sums, the acquisition of which caused him to strike his breast with such deep contrition! He continued to handle counters and shuffle cards until he reached that age when men get cured of all their defects, because they can derive no more pleasure from them. As an old man, he used to indict gambling in every shape and form.

“Never gamble. Always remember that I have lost many millions by betting on certainties.” Such was the advice he tendered to younger men, but he forgot to mention to them the amounts which he had won, as well as those he had lost.

We must now revert to our main subject, and return

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to the consideration of the "Constituante" and its debates, which had a most important bearing upon the history of the Revolution and upon Talleyrand's career.

The House was spell-bound, when on the 10th of October the Bishop of Autun endorsed the views of Mirabeau, and in clear and firm tones proposed the alienation of all Church property, a measure drafted by a high dignitary of the Church, with a view to handing over the patrimony of his Order to the creditors of the State.

On the 4th of August the nobility had spontaneously sacrificed its privileges in behalf of the Nation, amid the frantic plaudits of the Assembly. The Deputy of Charolles, one Marquis de La Coste, had propounded in confused terms a Bill the object of which was to effect the appropriation of ecclesiastical property.¹ The Bill was dropped because public opinion was not sufficiently educated. Talleyrand fathered the idea which he would have opposed on the previous day, had he thought it premature and unlikely to bear fruit. But it was ripe, and he felt convinced that it was bound to triumph in one shape or another. He cleverly made it his own and reaped the full reward, to the utter surprise of those who had sent him to the Assembly as the defender of ecclesiastical rights and interests. By adopting this unforeseen initiative, Talleyrand, the late Agent-General of the Clergy, began to apply the political system of his whole life, which consisted of sacrificing the morality of his personal actions upon the altar of the public good.

He had begun to attend to the interests of the Clergy as far back as 1775, and was therefore well aware that the Church would never willingly forego the immunity of her possessions, which she considered an intangible

¹ At the sitting of the 8th of August. Two days previously Buzot had hurled this sentence which was lost in the din, "I maintain that all Church property belongs to the Nation."

principle. As Agent-General of his Order, Talleyrand knew that the clergy was violently attacked by the philosophers, condemned by public opinion, envied for its wealth, and that it was gradually losing the respect and consideration of its so-called faithful. He had therefore advised proportional sacrifices on their part, by which the sympathy of the public could be regained.¹ His suggestion met with the keenest opposition, and his hearers refused to hand over a single centime. The spirit of evangelical abnegation afforded an eloquent theme for pastoral letters and Cathedral sermons, but Bishops and Abbés could not really offer themselves as examples of Christian self-sacrifice. This was asking too much of them, although at this very time their poorer brethren, known as the lower or minor Clergy, were practically starving.²

When Jean-Baptiste de Machault, the Finance Minister, tried to obtain revenue by taxing Church property, he met with dead opposition from the clergy, who argued that that which was given to the Church could not be taken back, inasmuch as it was consecrated by Almighty God. The logical evolution of time, however, pursued its steady course. A spirit of reform was asserting itself with untold strength, but still the clergy remained as obdurate as in the year 1725, when it refused to submit to a tax of one-fiftieth of its income. The alarming depletion of the Treasury and the desperate poverty and distress of the country at large, created no impression

¹ "I wanted the Clergy to purchase the right of holding a lottery in order to suppress it" (*Talleyrand's Memoirs*, vol. i., p. 52).

On the same day that he made this suggestion, he brought in a Bill for the relief of the country Clergy.

² The Government had been compelled to intervene in several dioceses in behalf of the proletariat of the Church. An edict of 1768 enacted that a Parish Priest should receive 500 francs (£20) a year, and a Curate 200 francs (£8). In 1778 the salary of the former was increased to 700 francs (£28), and that of the latter to 250 francs (£10), and to 350 (£14) in 1785. On the other hand, a high dignitary enjoyed half, and sometimes three-fourths of the tithes. The Abbé de Clairvaux, a large tithe-owner, had an income of 400,000 francs (£16,000) a year, Cardinal de Rohan was content with 1,000,000 (£40,000), while the Benedictines of Cluny had a revenue of 1,800,000 francs or £72,000 a year, and those of Saint-Maur a small income of £320,000! These were by no means exceptional cases (see the *Memoirs of Talleyrand*, p. 53).

upon this privileged class, which set up a stubborn defence of its interests. Some of its members pleaded that it was their sacred duty to safeguard the patrimony of the poor. Others, such as Bishops and high dignitaries, insisted that they represented the prestige of the whole Body Corporate, and that such prestige would receive a heavy blow if their means were curtailed. They added that they must retain the exclusive possession of the wealth bequeathed to the Church by her pious faithful, or else become a heavy charge upon the State. Numerous discussions had taken place upon the question of tithes, free-offerings, and Church freeholds. The abolition of the tithes had been suggested at the Assembly of "Notables." Monsieur de Boisgelin, Archbishop of Aix, strongly opposed the motion, and said: "Tithes are a voluntary gift made by the faithful." The Duc de la Rochefoucauld interrupted him: "Tithes are a voluntary gift made by the faithful, and they defray the costs of forty thousand lawsuits in this kingdom."

The clergy complained bitterly of the unjust sentiments and unseemly conduct of those who sought to conspire against its property and strip it of its privileges. Arguments and texts innumerable were adduced in favour of the existing conditions by which the Church corporate did not contribute a farthing towards the expenditure of the Nation. A private meeting of Churchmen was held in the Palace of Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld, with a view to strengthening the national credit by means of personal sacrifices on the part of the clergy. Jean-Marie Dalou, an Archbishop, sprang to his feet, and solemnly declared that he thought this an admirable opportunity for compelling the Nation to pay the debts of the clergy. Talleyrand heard him, and could hardly realise that the speaker was in earnest. It seemed to him incredible that sane men should be so rash and demented as to foster hopeless illusions, while they were being dashed to the ground by the furious onrush of stupendous events.

The clergy refused to yield an inch or to make the

smallest concessions to public opinion. The storm broke out before long, and their whole fabric was dashed to the ground by one fell blow. The angry wave of popular indignation swept away those rights and privileges which the clergy of France boasted of having received from the Capitulars of Charlemagne. A Bishop dealt the first blow at the "Sacred Colossus."

The ecclesiastical deputies were dumbfounded when they read the text of his Bill. While the "Revolutionists" and the "Capitalists"¹ applauded frantically, the Abbé Maury withered Talleyrand's proposals in scathing terms. "We can only deplore the sad fate of Mother Church at the hands of her unfaithful son," added the Abbé de Montesquiou.

The treason of the Bishop of Autun provoked a terrible storm on the benches of the Right whose occupants wilfully ignored the speeches delivered by orators of the Left, such as Barnave, Pétion, Treilhard, and Mirabeau, who not only supported but developed and amplified Talleyrand's suggestions. He alone was held guilty of the sins of Israel. The Chapter of his Cathedral wrote him a strong letter of protest, which he answered with much dexterity without, however, converting his Clergy to his way of thinking. In his reply, he asserted that he was working in the interests of peace and reparation. Later on, he played the same part when discussing the terms of the "Concordat." He pleaded that he had chosen of two evils the lesser, but his pleading was not accepted. It was denounced and flouted by all orthodox men. The clergy unanimously proclaimed his spiritual downfall. He was assailed by countless libels and lampoons, insulted and ridiculed. His name was not mentioned in certain *salons*, where he was referred to as "that scoundrel, that fiendish individual." Talleyrand took no heed of the storm, and was not even bespattered by all this muddy scum.²

¹ The "Capitalists" were those who were in favour of seizing the capital of the Church.

² Confessions of the Bishop of Autun: dialogue between the Bishop of Autun and the Abbé Maury; the truth as told to the Bishop

Talleyrand had measured the full-length blow which he had struck. His motion of the 10th of October had procured for him his Revolutionary naturalisation. Henceforth the nobleman and mighty prelate could not be looked upon as a suspect. The part he played in the great duel fought between the two classes of society drove him into the arms of the Revolution. To this was due the fact that he was adopted by the subsequent régimes and became a Minister of the Directoire, even under Barras and the survivors of the "Terreur." The hostages which he had just given to democracy were deemed so great that Talleyrand was called upon to accomplish a great task, which riveted upon him the attention of the whole Nation. The delegates to the festival of the Federation chose him as the Celebrant of the Mass which was to be said in the presence of a huge concourse of people upon the Champ de Mars. The honour conferred upon him was a dubious one, for it seemed a parody that he, of all men, should celebrate the sacred sacrifice. Yet he acquiesced and eagerly carried out the task of the Assembly. The 14th of July, 1790, is an important date in the annals of the Revolution, for on that day all the hopes of France found expression in the one breath. For weeks the men, women, and children of Paris had striven to level the rugged ground of the Champ de Mars. They sang merrily as they worked, thus cheating the fatigue imposed upon them by their voluntary labour. The work was accomplished in due time, and on the appointed day the Federates assembled in the

of Autun, or a *Précis* of the life of Autun, the worthy Minister of the federation [Paris, 1790].

We have extracted the following lines which will afford an accurate idea of the tone in which these statements were couched: "Infamous Bishop, the shame and scandal of the clergy, the scum of the nobility, the opprobrium of all honest men, the lowest, vilest, and most contemptible of all swindlers, you have wilfully ruined a body of which you were the trusted Agent, and you have proved yourself a monster of ingratitude towards your King, who had endowed you with the wealth of that same body which you now trample upon, because it was the strongest upholder of the Throne. A second Judas, you have sold your Church, your conscience, and your King to that same Jewish Nation which has rewarded you with its cash for all your heartless crimes."



THE 10TH OF AUGUST, 1792 (THE STORMING OF THE TUILERIES)

capital from every part of the country. It was in mid-summer. The sun had just reached the zodiacal sign of the Lion and cast its generous rays of light upon the joyous multitude. But suddenly the elements began to sulk like true aristocrats, and soon the hopes of all present were damped by successive downpours and swept by violent gusts of wind. But all this could not still the clamour of the thousands who continued to sing and laugh in spite of the disturbing elements. The first arrivals whiled away the time by dancing in the mud. Soon the immense amphitheatres of Chaillot and of Passy were filled with spectators who had come to witness the march past of fifty thousand men. Suddenly there was a lull followed by complete silence. The King, the Queen, and their Court had arrived and were taking their seats. La Fayette, on horseback, awaited the orders of the Sovereign. The religious ceremony was about to begin. Talleyrand ascended the steps of the National Altar, with a limping gait, of course, but with stern and dignified countenance. He was attended by two hundred Priests and the Chaplains of the National Guard, whose white surplices were girded by the *tricolore* sash. Supported by Levites and soldiers, he generously sprinkled the King, the Court, the people in the Army with Holy Water and profuse blessings. His name was on every lip. He was the Abbé de Périgord-Talleyrand, the Bishop of Autun, the Orator and politician whom the multitude beheld with sentiments and admiration. He celebrated the Holy sacrifice, assisted by the Abbés Louis and Desrenaudes, and when the prayers were terminated, the beating of three hundred drums heralded the fact that his sacred hand was about to bless the oriflammes and the banners of eighty-three French departments. The roar of forty cannon rent the air, sacred oaths were sworn in the presence and within the hearing of heaven and earth. In the name of the National Guard, La Fayette swore fealty to the Nation, to its Lords, and to its King. Louis XVI testified to the deep love which filled his heart for his people. The Queen raised the

little Dauphin in her arms and presented him to the assembled multitudes, who had once more grown generous and caressing, and as an apotheosis to this alliance, all too ephemeral between the Revolution and the tottering Royalty, the Bishop of Autun began the *Te Deum*, the strains of which were taken up by twelve hundred executants. The crowd was thrilled and shuddered with emotion. Swords were unsheathed and glittered. Tears flowed from all eyes amid exclamations of joy and mutual love. From the steps of the altar which was raised in the vast arena, Talleyrand gazed with scepticism upon the spectacle of this last illusion of a Nation whose true feelings were paralysed upon the final day of truce. At the conclusion of the ceremony, when the crowds had dispersed and the banners had been replaced in their sockets, Talleyrand breathed freely once more and returned with joy to his political work. It was a strange concourse of circumstances, for on the very eve of the Federation he had addressed a pastoral letter to the faithful of Autun, ordaining the recital of the most solemn prayers in the liturgy, the prayers of the Forty Hours to wit, so as to obtain from Heaven some improvement in the condition of the country which had recently been sorely tried and damaged by climatic influences. Only two days previously he had voted for the civil constitution of the clergy, without taking any part in the debate upon the relations between Church and State. It was a measure fraught with danger, which he did not then approve of and which he afterwards condemned as a grievous political mistake.¹ On the 28th of December² he took the following oath at the Bar of the House: "I swear that I shall fulfil my duties to the best of my ability, remaining faithful to the French Nation, to its laws, and to its King, and upholding with all my might the constitution, and more especially its decrees relating to the civil status of the Clergy."

¹ "I am not afraid to admit, notwithstanding my action in the matter, that the civil constitution of the Clergy was one of the most grievous mistakes committed by the Assembly."

² Parliamentary Archives, vol. xxi., p. 687.

There had not yet been a complete rupture between him and Autun. He tried the effect of a further letter of explanation to his clergy, in which he assured them that the integrity of the Dogma was in no way jeopardised, and that instead of being abrogated, the laws of the ecclesiastical community had in reality been enforced. He implored them to follow his advice for the sake of peace. He failed in this,¹ but was not affected by his failure, as he foresaw that he would soon relinquish his sacerdotal duties. He took the first step in that direction at the earliest possible moment. On the 17th of January he was appointed Deputy of the Seine, together with Mirabeau, La Rochefoucauld, and d'Ormesson, and he forthwith resigned the bishopric of Saône-et-Loire.²

¹ We append the answer sent to this Bishop by the Rectors of Saône-et-Loire, who made no attempt to measure their terms :

“ Monseigneur,

“ Your apostacy has taken no one by surprise. Having now sunk so low that nothing can sully or degrade you in the minds of right-thinking people, you are no doubt preparing to consummate your iniquity and receive the reward for your shameful services. You are strangely mistaken if you flatter yourself that you have found accomplices in the self-respecting ministers to whom your letter is addressed. Imitation is born of esteem. The sacrilegious spoliator of the Church, the devil's counsel, is hardly entitled to our respect or confidence. So pray cease to depend upon such ties as should bind us to you. We loathe these ties of iniquity which would henceforth be impious, illegitimate, and disgraceful. We shall remain faithful to our legitimate masters, whom the Church has placed over us.

“ How dare you take any part in religious matters ? How does the word ‘ Religion ’ find its way to your lips ? Have you forgotten this oath which you swore with all the sincerity of your soul, this oath of a heretic, an apostate, and a schismatic, this oath to betray your holy religion, to violate the rules of the Church, with a hatred worthy of her bitterest enemies ?

“ You pretend to honour religion so as to stab her in the back. *‘ Osculo tradis eum. ’*

“ You shall deceive neither God nor men. Infamy in this world and retribution in the next ! What a destiny awaits you ! You, a pontiff of our Holy Religion, the apostles' successor, you wish to drag us down with you into the abyss ! You can imagine, Monseigneur, the feelings of gratitude and respect with which we subscribe ourselves.

“ Your very humble and obedient servants,

“ THE RECTORS OF SAÔNE-ET-LOIRE.”

² His decision was thus made known to the administrators of the Diocese of Autun :

“ 20th of January, 1791.

“ Gentlemen,

“ I was chosen some days ago by the Paris electors as one of their representatives, and I have felt bound to accept the honour con-

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The faithful priests of Autun were deeply grieved, and they constantly confided their sorrows to their parishioners. They had no more pastor, no spiritual guide through all this darkness !

“ Our greatest misfortune, the one which really leaves us disconsolate, is that we ourselves are without a guide who can direct and enlighten us ! Alas, we have lost him, for he is no more a child of Aaron ! ” Talleyrand was lost to them “ through his own errors.”¹ They did not fare much better with his successor, the Abbé Gouttes, a late Dragoon and a Revolutionary Deputy, who was elected Bishop of Autun at Mâcon.

Maurice de Talleyrand was the innovator of this new Schism. Notwithstanding the express inhibitions of the Pope, he decided to consecrate the new Constitutional Bishops. A Papal brief of the 10th of March, 1791, excommunicated him and all the priests who took the constitutional oath. He does not seem to have taken this much to heart, for this is what he wrote to the Duc de Lauzun :

“ You have no doubt heard about my excommunication. Do come and comfort me and remain to supper. Henceforth, I am to be refused both bread and water, but to-night we shall have iced viands and iced champagne.”²

He felt less comfortable the day he had to consecrate the Bishops chosen by the people in the Chapel of the Oratory. Two colleagues had been appointed his assistants, and all three were in a state of great anxiety.

ferred upon me by the population of a city in which I was born and educated, and in which all my family resides. Being now compelled to reside here, I cannot remain Bishop of Saône-et-Loire, so I have the honour to inform you that I have tendered my resignation to His Majesty, and have humbly requested him to take such steps as are necessary to ensure the early election of my successor ” (Archives of Saône-et-Loire, Series i., Autun).

¹ Rome had spoken : “ The best thing that can happen is to see him abandoning his sacred calling and the Church of his own accord, he who has so well deserved to be stripped of his frock and expelled from our midst ” (Epistola E.S.R.E., Cardinalis de Zelada, præcipui summi Pontificis ministri, ad Vicarios generales episcopi Augustodunensis, 4 des nones d’avril, 1791).

² The authenticity of this letter has been questioned, which seems a pity, as it is most original.

Talleyrand considered that they were exposed to considerable danger. He feared excesses on the part of the populace and of the dissentient Clergy, who he thought would heap holy vengeance upon his head. He actually took the precaution to draft and sign his will, which he sent to Mme de Flahaut. She returned home rather late on the 23rd of February and found a large sealed envelope upon her table. It contained the will of the Bishop of Autun, of "her Bishop," who made her his universal legatee. Her tender heart beat violently as she perused the document. She spent the night in tears. At four the next morning she sent M. de Sainte-Foix to find out what had happened. The Bishop had not slept in his house, having been threatened with death. He remained in safe hiding with a friend at the Rue Saint-Honoré.

His coadjutors were also greatly agitated. Gobel, Bishop of Lydda, had warned the Bishop of Autun that a third Bishop, who held the See of Babylon, *in partibus*, was also faltering. His name was Dubourg-Miroudot. Talleyrand sought him without delay and informed him that Gobel, their colleague, was about to betray his word, but that he, Talleyrand, knew only too well what would be the consequences of such an action. He added that if he found himself forsaken by one of his colleagues, he would not bare his breast to a frenzied mob, but would sooner kill himself. As he spoke he played with a little revolver, the sight of which created a deep impression upon the waning courage of Bishop Miroudot. The fear of a greater danger counteracted that of the lesser one.

The three prelates arrived punctually at the chapel of the Oratorians, the superior¹ of which was won over to the Constitutional Clergy. Nothing occurred to justify their fears.

The affairs of the Church of France were going from bad to worse. The Archbishopric of Paris was vacant, owing to the departure of Monseigneur de Juigné, who, notwithstanding his spirit of conciliation and his extreme

¹ Father Poiret.

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suavity,¹ had refused to take the Constitutional oath. Talleyrand's was the first name mentioned as that of his successor, but he declined the honour of becoming the titular of the most important see in the Kingdom, saying that such an exalted pontificate should be entrusted to worthier hands. His refusal was really dictated by the desire to shirk such heavy responsibilities at a time when open war was being waged against religion and its ministers. His one ambition was to forsake a career which he had been compelled to adopt, and the allurements of which did not prove strong enough to induce him to accept a Cardinal's hat when the Concordat was signed. He wore purple for the last time on the occasion of the second celebration in the Cathedral of the taking of the Bastille. Having personally recommended Gobel for the Diocese of the Seine, he could not help attending this strange service, during which psalms and canticles sounded like the "Carmagnole."

The papal monitory, by which he was unfrocked, reached him in London in 1792, but long before that time he had returned to secular life, caring little for the opinion of those who used his name as a corner-stone to scandal. The Royalists and orthodox Churchmen made no distinction between the Abbé Grégoire, Foucher, the Oratorian from Nantes, Chabot, the Franciscan and the late Bishop of Autun. They were all classed in the same category. They were apostates. Talleyrand gladly let them harbour their opinion. He had no feelings of animosity against the religion of which he had been compelled to become a minister, and he thought it right that those who had been brought up in its principles should continue to adhere to them; but he did not think that such principles could benefit the world, and he discarded the clerical garb, which hampered his progress, without resentment or any desire to provoke the anger of his former colleagues.

¹ It was Monseigneur de Juigné, "the Father of the Poor," who had given to Talleyrand the *Pallium* on the morrow of his consecration. This was a distinction bestowed by the Popes upon the diocese of Autun only.

It is not an easy thing to divorce oneself from the Priesthood, although one may cast off its external signs. Many of his friends continued to call him "the Bishop," some from mere habit and others in order to vent their spite by thus comparing his episcopal status with the irregularities of his private life. The American, Governor Morris, noted in his memoirs that the Bishop now paid daily visits to the alcove of Madame de Souza. Although his clerical title was still conferred upon him, Talleyrand's relations with the Church had practically ceased to exist. Like many others, he who was formerly an onlooker had become an active participator in the chaotic events which sank a monarchy and heralded the coming of a surging Revolution that threatened the world with its unbridled violence. He took his bearings with infinite skill.¹ He devoted his wonderful perspicacity to observing the advent of new men who had been thrown into the whirl of politics and the meshes of diplomacy by unforeseen circumstances. At times he overrated their capabilities before seeing them at work.² He wrote voluminous reports upon questions of Finance and Education, pending the time when he could assume a definite mode of action, if possible beyond the frontiers. He was the subject of many conversations among the followers of Mirabeau. This man of passion and common sense combined, had not forgotten that it was Talleyrand who suggested, in 1786, that he should be sent to Berlin as a secret Agent. At that time, the list of occult diplomatists contained illustrious names, or names destined to become illustrious. It was now his turn to send Talleyrand to London in

¹ To safeguard the ties existing between France and the Catholic unity, to make one and all believe that these ties were not broken and could not be torn asunder; to reassure the King, urging him to patiently await the turn of events, to make him accept this civil Constitution which was oppressing him, to protect the Priests who had refused to take the oath by invoking in their favour that freedom which the Declaration of the rights of man afforded them (he himself had helped to draft them); in a word, to evolve order out of disorder and serve Royalty while flirting with Revolution; this was the wonderful plan adopted by Talleyrand. It would seem incredible were it not attested by authentic documents (B. de Lacombe, *Talleyrand, Bishop of Autun*, pp. 281, 282).

² To wit in his erroneous judgment of Barthélemy.

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order to ensure the neutrality of Britain and thus defend the interests of France against the threatened coalition. He was the best emissary that could be found for such a task. In his early youth he had belonged to a debating society called the "Economical Society," together with Mirabeau, Ponchaud and Dupont de Nemours, and had always contended that an alliance between France and England would mean universal peace. On his death-bed, Mirabeau discussed the plans of a Franco-British alliance with Talleyrand, knowing that they held the same views concerning this scheme which was then the dream of France.

External complications were increasing daily. Doubtful and wavering friends were about to become avowed enemies, and it was a most important matter to make a proper selection of those who should go forth and hold a brief for France in foreign lands. Talleyrand's help was sought. He gave the best advice, and dictated his instructions to Jarry, who was sent to win over Prussia to the French Court. Jarry must insist upon obtaining from the Emperor a definite answer. Talleyrand then urged the necessity of sending a trusted representative to England, whose secret mission would convey but little at the onset, but would prepare the way for "after-thoughts." He proposed the name of Biron, who had not yet received a military command; his proposal was queried, as he knew it would be.

"Why do you not go yourself?" was the question put to him.

He pretended to decline the offer from motives of humility, saying that M. de Biron's talents were far superior to his, and that he would be the right man in the right place. De Lessart insisted that Talleyrand should go, because Vienna and Berlin would realise that France was in earnest when she consented to forgo his services at home during his absence in London.

Talleyrand said that he would think the matter over until that evening, although he had quite made up his mind to accept the invitation.

His friend de Narbonne was a War Minister whose influence was felt in all the other Government departments. He had the goodwill of the Court and of the majority of the Assembly. His foresight, intuition, and natural charm¹ gave rise to great hopes, notwithstanding his natural levity. His promising career afforded the utmost satisfaction to all his friends, especially to Madame de Staël, his Egeria, whose happiness would have been complete if she could have seen him at the head of a Government. She could then direct the affairs of the Nation as the worthy partner of its Prime Minister.²

Circumstances seemed to favour Talleyrand, who was quite justified in seizing an exceptional opportunity for endeavouring to effect a most useful purpose abroad. Governor Morris endeavoured to convince him that an Embassy was the surest road to fortune and the least compromising of all. He preferred, however, to go to England in his private capacity, to observe [on the spot the tendencies and opinions of the British nation, and to follow the trend of events. The preliminary negotiations as between the two countries were to be based upon the reports which he sent to his Government. He sailed for England, hoping to undermine the influence of Pitt, the protagonist of the coalition.

¹ On the 16th of December, 1791, Narbonne wrote the following charming letter to Biron:

"I humbly crave your pardon for not having penned you a single line since I have become Minister, but you can well imagine that I am so crushed with work as to be unable to consecrate any time for my own pleasure."

Biron, on the other hand, loudly sang the praises of Narbonne to Talleyrand in his letter of the 25th of December:

"Narbonne's behaviour is simply perfect. He sees everything, notes everything, and is on the best of terms with everyone. His tour of inspection has created an excellent impression upon the Army."

² Her tender and masculine imagination had conceived wonderful dreams for the future of Narbonne, who was, after all, but a brave, brilliant, and energetic man. She had endeavoured to widen the perspective of his thoughts, to render him sagacious in his judgment of men and things, persevering, energetic, and strong. So ably had she accomplished her task that many looked to him now as the supreme arbiter between the Throne and the Nation. Alas! nothing could endure in the midst of this Revolutionary turmoil! Individuals and institutions were swiftly, suddenly, washed away by the rising tide to which there seemed no ebb.

This he meant to do with the help of Biron, whose numerous and powerful friends in London would enable him to form useful cabals against the English Minister. His first object was to effect an English alliance, strengthened by a commercial treaty. To this policy he remained ever faithful, notwithstanding the upheavals of the European Wars, of the Revolution and of the Empire in 1792, 1814, and 1830.

Although his journey was not an official one, it assumed vast importance in the minds of Sovereigns and Statesmen who were engaged in the struggle against France. Victor Amédée III, King of Sardinia, was so perturbed by the abstention of Great Britain that he approached Prussia and the Empire. On the 1st of February, 1792, he wrote : " This projected alliance between France and England would prove fatal to us." Austria and the Emperor were deeply concerned, and Valdec de Lessart had been compelled to reassure them. He said to the ambassador de Noailles, " The journey of the Bishop of Autun is the outcome of our earnest desire to allay public opinion."

Such was the general situation when Mirabeau's late colleague arrived in London. The future negotiator of the Treaties of Vienna began his diplomatic career in a very eminent school, at which he met William Pitt, the son of the great Chatham, and the living contrast of his father's principles. William Pitt was a man with a double conscience, whose private life was exemplary and whose political life was bereft of all sense of morality. He was tenacious, but not frank. He was supple, and yet assumed a haughty demeanour. Lord Grey indicted him in the following words :

" Pitt never proposed a measure to the Commons without meaning to deceive them. From the very start he was an apostate in the fullest sense of the word."

Moreover, he was the avowed enemy of France. His cousin, Lord Grenville, was Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and Lord Gower, British Ambassador in Paris, advised

him officiously of Talleyrand's private mission to England. This Earl Gower, first Duke of Sutherland, had been apprised of it by mere chance on the 19th of January. He had received his information from the Minister de Lessart, who had told him that "Monsieur l'Evêque" would reach England by a circuitous route, as he had to go to Valenciennes to meet the Duc de Biron, who had been ordered by letter to accompany him to England. Biron shared Talleyrand's views upon the desirability of an understanding between the two countries. He knew that his London friends could be of great service to the Bishop of Autun. No better choice could have been made than that of Talleyrand. De Narbonne, the War Minister, expressed his view to his dear Lauzun :

"I thought, my dear friend, that this little trip to England would provide an excellent cure for your jaundice, and I am sure I was not mistaken."

The journey was effected under the most pleasant auspices, and before the travellers landed their arrival was commented upon by the Press. It was stated that Talleyrand's efforts would prove fruitless, inasmuch as he had already had interviews with Pitt, but without result. Such statements were somewhat premature, for they were made at the time when the two statesmen had not yet met. He had a letter of introduction to Lord Grenville. Its terms were essentially vague, and it could not be interpreted as an official credential because the Constitution prohibited him from filling any public office, save in appearance.¹

It was, indeed, a strange situation. Talleyrand was entrusted with the negotiation of interests which were all-important for the preservation of peace. He had to

¹ This prohibition was formal. The suspicious Robespierre had taken his precautions by including in Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 4, the following clause, which was voted on the 7th of April: "Members of the present National Assembly, and of subsequent legislatures as well as Members of the Supreme Court of Appeal and of the Grand Jury, shall not be eligible as Ministers, nor shall they hold any office, or receive any donations, pensions, salaries, or commissions from the executive, or from its agents, so long as they remain Members of the said legislatures, and during a further period of two years after they have ceased to be Deputies."

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explain his reasons to Ministers, who all granted him a grudging hearing, while some of them were actually hostile to him. He had to perform his duty with tact and subtlety while imposing his own authority, remembering that he had neither official nor real qualifications to support his claims or strengthen his arguments. However ably he spoke, he was deprived of the best means of inspiring any real confidence.¹ De Lessart's letter to Lord Grenville was couched in the following terms :

“ This letter will be handed to your Excellency by M. de Talleyrand-Périgord, late Bishop of Autun, who is going to England, in order to study matters which interest him personally. (Then came a long description of Talleyrand's personal merits, of his wit and distinguished talents.)

“ As member of the ‘ Assemblée Constituante,’ M. de Talleyrand can accept no diplomatic offers, but, being well versed in political matters, especially in our relations with England, I feel sure that if your Excellency will converse with him, he will prove to your satisfaction our desire to maintain and strengthen the good feelings which exist between the two kingdoms.”

It was Talleyrand's wish to use every means in order to attain this object. He knew that his task was an arduous one. Of this he became aware the very first time he went to Court. The King was a personal enemy of the French Revolution, and he gave him a very cold reception. The Queen had decided not to speak a word to him, and maintained a rigid silence during the whole evening. He quickly analysed the feelings of the Court of St. James, recognising in the meantime that the country at large was well disposed towards France.

“ *No war with France* ” was written in charcoal on the walls of the city. He clearly perceived that the British Cabinet viewed with secret satisfaction the internal troubles of a country which was England's commercial

¹ Pitt's first observation to Talleyrand when they met was to the effect that his mission was not invested with any definite or official character.



MADAME MARIE ADELÄIDE DE BOURBON, DUCHESSE
D'ORLÉANS (1753-1821)

rival, and that British interests and the security of the world would be best served if this state of anarchy were allowed to prevail.¹

English society was keenly interested in studying Talleyrand's easy manners, refined politeness, observant ways, and almost haughty reserve, which differed vastly from the usually vivacious French character. His personality would have proved most sympathetic but for the repercussion of the terrible events which were occurring daily in France. He did his utmost to dispel the prejudice existing against his mission (not against himself), but that prejudice was too strong to be overcome by him. The Party to which he belonged, and by which he was best known and trusted, could meet with no indulgence at the hands of the British aristocracy. He did not fare better at those of his own Government, which lay low, and was ready to throw him over at the slightest sign of resistance or discontent. The Party led by Lameth and Barnave openly opposed his Mission, while from those who shared his views of the extreme importance of the neutrality of England in the event of a continental war, he only secured the expressions of useless intentions, which were paralysed by discouragement, if not despair. He had barely begun his work when the rumour was spread that Governor Morris had been sent to London with the express object of hampering his dealings with the British Ministers. His friend Biron could not help him, because personal reasons had placed him in a very tight corner. Narbonne had entrusted him with the purchase of horses, and his dealings had had a most unfortunate result. His name was forged upon promissory notes which got into circulation, and large sums of money were claimed from him. Whether he owed them or not, the fact remains that he could not pay them within the prescribed time. He was arrested for a stated debt of £4500, while many other sums were claimed against him. Thus a nobleman entrusted with a mission to England in

¹ See Talleyrand's letter of the 23rd September, 1792, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

behalf of the King of France and the French Nation was thrust into jail like a common mortal. Applications for his release were made to Lord Kenyon, President of the King's Bench, who, however, refused to grant it. His arrest created a great sensation, and much ridicule was poured upon the circumstances which had caused it and the various measures that Talleyrand had to take in consequence of it.¹

Although his mission was beset with difficulties of all sorts, he never relaxed his efforts, and his remarkable strength of character enabled him to enforce his views and pursue his task the while he was practically forsaken by those who should have supported him. He effaced himself purposely, never assuming an official character, so that an unfavourable answer given to him might not be construed in days to come as the reply made by England to the French Nation. He had not the title of Ambassador,² which he thought so useful to confer upon someone else, but not upon himself. Yet his individual authority and extraordinary power enabled him to supplement the want

¹ Biron complained bitterly to Narbonne :

“Boulogne, 21st February, 1792.

“My dear Narbonne,

“The disastrous journey which you made me undertake to England, has at last come to an end. I do not reproach you with the misfortunes that befell me, nor with the intolerable and enduring consequences which must follow. I will only say that did I not know how true and loyal you are to me, and had I only to judge the conduct of a Minister bound hand and foot to my enemies, I should hold you guilty of the most atrocious treachery, and consider myself entitled to publish my opinion of you. As it is, it is fortunate for me that in all this, I can only blame you for your levity and negligence. Yet I must tell you, not what you have done, but what others have made you do unknown to yourself.”

There were other reasons adduced besides the purchase of horses. It is well known that the Duc de Biron was an assiduous frequenter of gambling-houses of London. The Prince of Wales and Lord Stormont did their best to raise the £160,000 he owed, but failed in the attempt. The Comte de Courchamps (a young Frenchman whom he had never met), and Lord Rawdon, one of his friends, found the sureties, and he was released on bail. His father, Field-Marshal de Biron, had performed the same service to the British Admiral, Lord Rawdon, whose release he had obtained in Paris, under similar circumstances.

² “Speaking ambitiously and constitutionally, I must admit to you that I should like to possess a title and sufficient time to create and affirm here, the most useful friendships that France could possess” (Talleyrand's letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs).

of it. He spoke, wrote, and conferred as one who had the most extensive powers. Though every step he took was hampered, he steadfastly pursued his course, and his efforts were amply rewarded. Avoiding all the pitfalls on his path, and parrying every blow aimed at him by intrigue and jealousy, he succeeded in wrenching a promise of neutrality from Great Britain, even in the event of an invasion of Belgium by France, who, however, was bound to respect Dutch territory. Moreover, he induced the Ministers of George III to recognise the Government which was born of the Constitution of 1791. Having achieved this dual result, he returned to France in July, 1792, when the mad fury of the Revolution had not yet stultified the efforts of diplomacy, still better results could have been hoped for at a time when her own interests impelled England towards peace. She was then confronted by grave difficulties in the Government of India and the relations between the Throne and the Commons were more than strained. In addition to these grave difficulties, the Government had to deal with financial reforms which had been solemnly promised, if not actually incepted. Pitt's hands were so full that he did not want to undertake a war. His bearing towards France was almost friendly, and he said to those whom it surprised, "We cannot hate for ever."

Talleyrand was not as satisfied with his journey as he might have been. On his return he found that mistrust, compromises of all sorts and dilatory measures had interposed between his Government and himself, the untitled representative of the French Nation. On the other hand, he had perceived during his residence in England that British Ministers had become much cooler towards him as they viewed with displeasure his cordial relations with the leaders of the opposition.

The Bishop had not deigned to return back to Paris. He had intended to visit Scotland, but changed his mind, and on the 10th of March, 1792, he announced his arrival to Valdec de Lessart in the following terms: "I am returning, sir, and I hope that before long I shall have the

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honour of seeing you; please accept my respectful homage." His wish was not satisfied, for on the very day he wrote this letter, Brissot secured the arrest of Lessart. Such changes were everyday occurrences during these troubled times. The political cards were shuffled once more. His friend de Narbonne had ceased to be a Minister, and all the papers and documents of the unfortunate Lessart were seized.¹

Tumult and agitation were the order of the day. Talleyrand did not tarry long in bewailing the fate of the conquered, but forthwith proceeded to steer his craft in a different direction. Great events had occurred, the effect of which was felt in France and the whole of Europe. Death had claimed the Emperor Leopold, whose conciliatory and peaceful nature had restrained the bellicose ardour of his followers. Would war be declared on the morrow? Talleyrand gauged the proper part to play, and in a few words summed up the whole system of general policy.

"Let us intrigue as much as we can in Germany, assume a very haughty manner towards Spain and Sardinia and pursue the friendliest negotiations with England."

This was his plan. He came to a satisfactory arrangement with Dumouriez, the Minister who held the province of Gironde in the palm of his hand, secretly came to terms with La Montagne,² and by successful intrigue was

¹ "Public opinion is unanimous concerning the indictment of M. de Lessart. It is iniquitous, and yesterday I met two Deputies who deplored it, and agreed that such a stain can never be obliterated from the history of the National Assembly.

"Madame de Staël, and Madame de Condorcet were alone responsible for the upheaval in the Cabinet, for the National Assembly followed their instructions in all things. The day before M. de Lessart was arrested, they had supped with twelve deputies all possessed of stentorian voices. Each one was told the part he had to play, and the plot was eminently successful. M. de Narbonne has been sent about his business. He wanted to be Minister of Foreign Affairs, and moved heaven and earth with this object, but I do not think that he can ever attain it now" (Pierre de Vaissière, *Letters of Aristocrats*).

² La Montagne, or "Les Montagnards," were the nicknames given to those members of the Convention who occupied the highest benches in the Chamber, and held the most advanced political views. (Adapter's note.)

appointed to carry out the last portion of its programme.¹ The unfortunate decree of the last Assembly still deprived him of the title which would have been in keeping with the duties he had to perform. Appearances were saved by the appointment of a Minister Plenipotentiary, the young Marquis de Chauvelin, one of the masters of the King's wardrobe and an intimate of Louis de Narbonne and of Talleyrand. It was agreed beforehand that this Minister should be subservient, and not act without the instructions of M. de Périgord, to whom he was only to lend his name. Chauvelin could not mistake the situation. Indeed, he hesitated to assume a great title when he was deprived of all powers, and to repair to England in a subordinate capacity. Common sense and a spirit of discipline prevailed, so he submitted to his fate.

On the 23rd of April Chauvelin left Paris to take up his post. Talleyrand started a few days later, bearing an important missive, which he had dictated. It was an autograph letter from Louis XVI to George III.

Although Dumouriez congratulated himself upon innovating a new system of negotiations,² from which he expected the best results, those who were entrusted with the direction of them had anything but an easy task.

This second mission to London as arranged by Talleyrand might have overcome many difficulties, had it only succeeded in producing discord in the concert of the allied Sovereigns. It failed to achieve this object because the French Revolution gave rise to too much apprehension, and was too prone to rush headlong into extremes. Its spirit of propagandism tended to widen the circle of diffidence. The English statesmen assumed a haughtier tone, and increased the number of their

¹ "I propose sending M. de Talleyrand to London as soon as possible. He has already conducted successful negotiations there, an account of which I will send to the King in the shape of extracts. Inasmuch as he cannot assume any title, I suggest that the King should give him a coadjutor of the rank of Minister Plenipotentiary" (Dumouriez's report to the King of the 28th of March).

² "I am sending the Bishop of Autun back to London with young Chauvelin. The decrees compel me to do so. I am thus opening up negotiations of a novel character" (Dumouriez's letter to Biron, 3rd of April, 1792).

exactions. It was difficult indeed for them to build a lasting edifice upon a trembling soil or to sign a treaty with a tottering Throne. While endeavouring to conciliate these rival interests, he became a suspect whose patriotism was gravely questioned. Secret agents dogged his steps unknown to himself, and falsely interpreted his relations with the British Government. They noted and reported adversely upon his friendship with some of the refugees. In a word, they seized on every possible symptom which they could construe against him, and filled their reports to Paris with the most deceitful insinuations. Notwithstanding his intimate relations with the Revolution, his aristocratic tastes and ideas had remained unaltered. He had not broken off with those of his rank and class such as the Comte de Vaudreuil and Madame de Flahaut, who certainly could not be called Jacobins. Moreover, the latent recollections of the whilom Court Abbé had been awakened by the recent arrival in London of Madame du Barry, the royal favourite who had fostered his early ambitions. Her presence in the English capital was due to a lawsuit, the cause of which was the theft of her diamonds, which had been stolen some years previously. She was living with the Duchesse de Brancas in a furnished house in Bruton Street, Berkeley Square, which had been let to them by Madame de la Suze. The Duchesse de Mortemart, daughter of the Duc de Brissac ¹ (a friend of hers whose friendship was most intimate), had joined her in Bruton Street, which became the trysting-place of a large number of former courtiers. The Abbé de Saint Phar and the Comte de Breteuil, Bertrand de Molleville and the Princesse d'Hénin, all lived in the same street. La du Barry was then forty-seven years of age, but time had dealt so kindly by her that one could easily realise the wonderful impression produced by her beautiful blue eyes, her lovely fair hair, her perfect

¹ Madame du Barry's friendship with the Duc de Brissac and Madame de Mortemart his daughter induced her to return soon to France, where she found that she had been denounced by Greive and Blache to sinister ruffians who had sworn her perdition.

mouth, and that voluptuous atmosphere which was imparted by her. Here, in Bruton Street, the courtiers of bygone days paid homage to one who had reigned supreme in the realm of royal love. As of old, her guests played for high stakes, gambling being their chief distraction. English society displayed a great deal of indulgence and sympathetic curiosity towards her. She went to Windsor and was presented to George III by the Duke of Queensberry. The British aristocracy discarded its usual austerity in her case. She was often a guest of Narbonne, whose house was frequented by Talleyrand.

These social relations were bound to compromise the servant of the Republic. They gave rise to grave suspicions, and attracted the inquisitorial attention of the police, one of whose agents reported as follows: "Noël insists that Reinhart looks upon Chauvelin as a weathercock, who changes his mind ten times a day. There is one thing certain, that the prelate often dines with Narbonne and Mathieu de Montmorency, and then sups with Chauvelin. These gentlemen are playing at cross purposes, and we are now compelled to tack." He was openly accused of intriguing in London on behalf of the Duc d'Orléans. He had gone to great pains to obtain from Lord Grenville the promise that England would pay no heed to what occurred in France, so long as France respected the rights of England's allies. He had good reason to congratulate himself upon his success, which ensured the immunity of the French coast, if it did not actually effect an alliance. It was, indeed, a matter of vast importance that the coast-line of France should not be bombarded by the British fleet while the enemy poured across her frontiers. The Prime Minister of the Assembly bestowed condign praise upon the wisdom and ability of the negotiators. Alas, the work they had just begun was already compromised, and the success they had hoped for gravely jeopardised. When Talleyrand came to Paris on a fortnight's leave of absence, with the object of seeing Scipion de Chambonas, the successor to Dumouriez, he found the city in a state of acute fer-

ment. Anarchy was rife. Chambonas had passed his hand to Du Bouchage, who had in turn resigned in favour of Sainte-Croix. The constitutional council of the department of the Seine, a body to which Talleyrand belonged, fell under the blows of the Jacobins. He himself felt that he was a suspect. He was now nicknamed the "mongrel patriot," a term which characterised the uncertain nature of his opinions. His own friends seemed to avoid him as a source of danger. His position was becoming intolerable. The riots of the 20th of June and the Revolution of the 10th of August had produced a disastrous effect in London. The relations between France and England were queried once more. The violent deeds perpetrated by the Revolution upon French soil placed the representatives of France abroad in a more than difficult position. Moreover, the Jacobin affiliations in England did not mince matters, but openly boasted of their intention to overthrow William Pitt and the Throne of England.

Talleyrand and Chauvelin had to divest themselves of their last illusions. They informed their friends that the neutrality of England could not now be hoped for, and that they feared the British Cabinet would head the coalition and wage war to the death.

Talleyrand did not allow the "Terreur" to overtake him in Paris. At the critical moment when the atmosphere was laden to the utmost, he remembered a man who had been nicknamed "the Mirabeau of the people." Danton and himself had been elected members for the Seine almost at the same time. They had often met, had exchanged views, and Danton had consulted him on foreign politics. He therefore hoped to obtain from him a passport which would enable him to return to London. Danton did not hesitate to grant his request.¹ He had

¹ Danton's enemies reminded him before the Revolutionary tribunal of the frequent visits of the Bishop of Autun which had caused him to be indicted. It was only one of many accusations embodied in the heinous report drawn up by Saint-Just.

"Malouet and the Bishop of Autun have often waited upon you. Therefore you favour them."

requested Talleyrand to draft the circular by which the Constitution of the Provincial Government was to be notified to the Cabinets of Europe which he hoped would recognise it. He instructed him to leave no stone unturned in order to secure the neutrality of England. Talleyrand had not yet obtained his passport. The executive council had curtly refused to grant it. Fear and a keen desire to get away from faction strife held him in a state of high fever. To all those for whom he entertained any regard or affection, he kept repeating: "Get away from Paris as soon as you can." He besought of Danton not to forsake him, but to provide him with the means of serving his country at a distance and with complete security. He averred that much useful work could be done by him across the frontier, were it only to obtain a uniform scale of weights and measures. He almost lived at the Ministry of Justice, the head-quarters of Danton. Barère noted in his diary that on the 31st of August, at eleven o'clock p.m., he had met M. de Talleyrand on the Place Vendôme wearing breeches and top-boots, a round hat, a short coat, and a periwig, ready to jump into a post-chaise. On the 7th of September he obtained the precious document, and a few minutes later he was on his way. There was nothing more difficult in those days than to obtain a passport enabling one to travel freely beyond the frontier. On the 28th of July, 1792, the Assembly decreed that no French citizen should be granted a passport, save such as were entrusted with Government missions. This order did not, however, apply to merchants or seafaring men.

There is no doubt that Talleyrand would have emigrated sooner or later, although he strenuously denied that such was his intention, but his natural ability enabled him to leave France in a much more desirable manner, as the representative of the French Government. Moreover, he had taken good care to receive formal instructions concerning his departure. It was high time for him to reach a haven of safety, for ex-Bishops were no more held in odour of sanctity than ex-courtiers and noblemen. He

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belonged to the three classes, and would have had a poor chance had he met men like Hébert, who said that the water-carriers of the city of Paris were too aristocratic for his taste. Had he remained a few days later in the capital, he would have shared the fate of the Constitutionalists, who were already falling in vast numbers under the axe of the Jacobins. Clever and all as he was, he would have been declared a suspect and judged by the law of suspects, which held in its meshes all and sundry who happened to be the victims of a denunciation.

Talleyrand's diplomatic mission was terminated on the 10th of August, although he was most anxious that it should continue. Henceforth his time was devoted to the promotion of his own interests and to his social relations in the British capital.

During the terrible year of 1793 he met with the greatest sympathy at the hands of the Marquis of Hastings, Governor-General of India, of Priestley, the great philosopher, George Canning, Samuel Romilly, Bentham and Charles Fox, all of whom endeavoured to make his residence in England as pleasant as possible. His place was laid at the board of the Marquis of Lansdowne, the late State Secretary, who strenuously opposed the policy of Pitt, and was very friendly towards France, if not towards the Revolution. The bright intelligence and brilliant conversation of the noble Marquis afforded much solace to Talleyrand, who sadly missed the charming intercourse of his Paris friends. He was always informed by his host of the presence and personality of such guests as might interest him. He often dined at Hackney with Stone, a poet of vast talent and ample means, two possessions which seldom hunt in couples.

Samuel Rogers records the fact that he dined with Stone as the fellow-guest of Fox, Sheridan, Madame de Genlis, and Talleyrand. The company of Charles Fox was much appreciated in society because of his lofty mind, his genuine and ingenuous love for all that was good, and

his charming nature, which, as Grattan expressed it, was accompanied by true greatness. On that particular evening Fox took little part in the general conversation, for his whole attention was devoted to a child, his own natural son, his living image. He caressed him with tender looks, but only conversed with him by signs.

“Is it not strange,” said Talleyrand to Samuel Rogers, “to be dining with the greatest orator of Europe, and to see him use the dumb language?” The Reverend Sydney Smith,¹ who was called “the Talleyrand of essayists and of the Anglican clergy,” had also met the famous diplomat in the course of the same year. He was thus enabled to learn from the Bishop of Autun himself what a poor opinion he had of ecclesiastical morality. Sydney Smith was joking in his presence with his brother Bobus, a barrister. “Remember, Bobus,” he said, “when you are on the woolsack, you will have to give me one of the fattest livings at your disposal.”

“Yes, dear brother, but beforehand, I shall apprise you of all the petty tricks of which your cloth is capable.”

Talleyrand threw up his hands and exclaimed, “Great Heavens, what enormous latitude you will indulge in, sir!”

It was thus he spent the awful year of 1793, during which he visited Mickleham, in Surrey, where he had the

¹ This Reverend Sydney Smith, whose slight relations with Talleyrand are recorded here, resumed his acquaintance later on in Paris, in the year 1826. He was not always reckoned among Talleyrand's friends. He was good enough to admit that M. de Périgord was extremely witty, and that many of his sayings were the cornerstones of that brilliant period. But he considered himself a wittier man, and often retired when Talleyrand entered the drawing-room. The famous diplomat was once overheard as he was speaking to Lord Holland in almost inaudible tones. They appeared so at any rate to a stranger unfamiliar with the French language. A few days later he said to Holland: “My dear sir, it seems an abuse to apply the term ‘words’ to the curious interjections made by M. de Talleyrand. I believe he has no teeth, no palate, no larynx, no trachea, no tonsils, no epiglottis, nothing.”

The reverend gentleman does not appear to have listened very attentively, for Talleyrand spoke in a clear, though deep voice, when he wished to be heard. The opinion of Mr. Smith hardly agrees with that of Madame de Staël, a trustworthy witness. She said, “If the conversation of M. de Talleyrand were for sale, I should beggar myself in endeavouring to purchase it.”

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pleasure of meeting a number of refugees, all belonging to his own set. Madame de Staël had just arrived from France, and had been given the use of a beautiful property by M. Locke, its owner. Narbonne and his friend d'Arblay, Mathieu de Montmorency, Malouet, Jaucourt, and Madame de la Châtre, who could not live away from Jaucourt, were all her guests. She imparted to them that excitement and vivacity which were part and parcel of her whole being. Soon the Princesse d'Hénin and Lally Tollendal joined the party, who gladly greeted the arrival of Talleyrand, the "incomparable friend," as Madame de Staël was wont to call him before she had fallen out with him. Fortune favoured the occupants of Jupiter Hall, for their neighbours were Dr. Burney and his daughters, Philippa and Fanny, the authoress of *Evelina*. The father and daughters were full of knowledge, grace, wit, and talent. They all indulged in conversations, excursions, and pleasant society games. At times the company listened to Madame de Staël and to Talleyrand.

Of all the refugees Talleyrand was Miss Burney's favourite, with the exception, perhaps, of General d'Arblay, to whom she became engaged. She was gradually conquered by the charms of Talleyrand.

"My conversion to M. de Talleyrand is almost incredible. I now consider him the first and greatest charmer of all the members of this delightful company.¹ His conversation and ideas are as marvellous as the wit and ability he displays." Little by little the group was dispersed. Madame de Staël was recalled to her husband in Switzerland and Talleyrand to his house in Woodstock Street, although he found it far too expensive for his limited means.² He spent his evenings in society. His mornings were devoted to writing and his afternoons to the careful perusal of current events. He was now but a distant witness of the events, the course of which he had wished to modify, but he fully realised that his policy was

¹ Miss Burney to Mrs. Locke, February, 1793 (*Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay*).

² *Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay*, p. 433.

being completely reversed. There was no more mention of a possible understanding between France and England. A tone of bitter hostility prevailed on both sides. The antagonism of their mutual views was fundamental. British gold was held at the disposal of the disunited armies of the Allies. In France the Committee of Public Safety declared through Merlin de Thionville, its mouth-piece, that it could not find expressions severe enough with which to brand "this odious Nation." The "*pugnent ipsi nepotes*" was the reply to the "*Delenda Carthago.*" The two anathemas were hurled with equal force from both sides of the Channel. Within a short time Talleyrand was denounced in France, held up to public opprobrium by Marat and Robespierre, and proscribed in England by Grenville and by William Pitt. The convention formally indicted him at its sitting of December, 1792. Two weeks after he had enlightened the Executive Council upon Pitt's real intentions the latter declared that he was a dangerous man, no doubt because the Bishop of Autun had read him so accurately. Riots and massacres were rife in Paris. The French democracy, which covered itself with glory before the enemy by its sublime patriotism and noble feats of arms, had reached such a condition of frenzy that it could only be saved by submitting to an all-powerful master. The Republican rabble, whose rising had been predicted by Louis XV, was now a terrible reality. Talleyrand had no desire to rush back into the furnace, from which he could never hope to escape alive. "What can we do," he wrote to Mme de Staël, "what can we do but wait and sleep?" He found it daily more difficult to breathe in the atmosphere of a foreign country, and foreseeing then that the stern measures with which he was threatened would soon be enforced,¹ he

¹ The Liberal noblemen who had joined the party of the Constitutional monarchy had begun to find that their life in London was well-nigh intolerable. The followers of the exiled Princes refused to know them. They were suspected by the Governments of the Allied Powers, and, moreover, they lived in constant fear of being expelled from England. Talleyrand expressed his anxiety and apprehension both on his own account and on that of his friends in the following letter addressed from London to Mme de Staël: "I am indeed happy

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wrote to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, asking him to grant him hospitality in his States. His request was not acceded to.¹ From the English shore he sadly kept count of the dates of the new martyrology, which grew apace since the execution of the King. While he still caressed the hope of witnessing the advent of a mete of justice and a ray of light in the midst of all this carnage and this darkness, he received the order to leave England within five days, as his presence there was considered a source of public danger.² He endeavoured to soften the hearts of British statesmen by invoking the sincerity of his intentions.

He wrote to Lord Grenville: "I came to England in search of peace and personal safety, under the protection of a Constitution that safeguards liberty and property. I am living here as I have always done, without taking part in the discussions or the interests of either side, and if all my political opinions and all my actions were made known, I should have nothing to fear at the hands of fair and just-minded men."

He did not gain his point, for Lord Grenville knew well that his third journey to England had been undertaken with other motives than that of seeking peace and rest. He was aware that most of Talleyrand's time was engaged in sending reports to Danton. Some friends advised him not to leave, as they meant to work in his behalf. He was offered the use of a house at the seaside, but decided to yield to the passions of the day, instead of waiting

that our Colony has settled in Switzerland, where she is much safer than in England. Even the position of Narbonne is anything but pleasant here. He is constantly compelling me to inquire from the Duke of Gloucester, or from Mr. Faukeen, whether it is true that such and such a Frenchman, or even that every constitutional Frenchman, would be compelled to leave London. This statement is made daily, and as a result our existence is rendered very hard indeed. Good-bye, dear one, I love you with all my soul."

¹ The Grand Duke of Tuscany justified his refusal by quoting a treaty of the 1st of August, 1778, by which Tuscany's neutrality was agreed to. This treaty had been renewed at the beginning of the war.

² He was expelled on the 29th of January, 1794. The same Alien Bill was put in force against Comte Zenobia, whose very existence was unknown to Talleyrand, against the Comte de Vaux, whose name he had never heard, and against a Brussels saddler called Simon.

indefinitely for better news. His material condition had become extremely precarious, for his whole fortune now consisted of about £750, the sum realised by the sale of his library. He was not possessed of a strong personal vocation for anything approaching martyrdom ; but he submitted quite serenely to trials which he did not think would long endure. Though endowed with a very calm nature, and little disposed to accomplish useless sacrifices, he would have been sorry had he been ignored in this rage of wholesale persecution and not called upon to bear his share of human injustices. In these troubled times life proved most insipid to those who had no troubles of their own. The soil of France was uprooted by an earthquake, and it was impossible to think of returning to Paris while the *sans-culottes* held sway. He therefore sailed for America, because he was denied that hospitality which he had hoped to find on British soil.

CHAPTER IV

THIRTY MONTHS IN AMERICA

On board ship—An agitated crossing—Talleyrand's impressions of Philadelphia and other cities of America, and of the Americans—His business trips and other excursions—How he lived or rather existed—Talleyrand's land speculations—He solicits commissions abroad—His distractions in Philadelphia—His return to France—Incidents of the voyage—Arrival at Hamburg—Madame de Flahaut fears lest the meeting should be of too intimate a nature—A table d'hôte story from the Hotel de l'Empereur—Talleyrand's return to Paris.

THE old world was behaving so badly that it was a pleasure to go and see with one's own eyes, even in spite of one's self, how things were managed in the new one. Talleyrand accepted his fate, and started with no other means than his scanty savings and the proceeds of the sale of his library. He wrote a few hurried letters to Mme de Staël and other friends, including those in Surrey, and promised them that he would return as soon as England had ceased to be a prey to petty human passions and had become once more the land of wide and hospitable liberty. He then boarded the first sailing-vessel bound for America.

It was an American trading-vessel, and his travelling companion was the Chevalier Albert de Beaumetz,¹ an intimate friend of his. They had much to say to each other. They wondered how long their exile would last, and what would be the end of this strange voyage which had been undertaken of their own free will. Their reflections were fully justified by the uncertainty of their position, their severance from all their friends, and the

¹ Beaumetz had been first President of the superior Council of Artois, and the representative of the nobility at the States-General, in which he voted with the Constitutional Party.

incredible upheavals of which they were the victims, fortunate in that they had not fallen under the cruel knife which had beheaded so many of their kinsmen. Their conversation would not have lagged had they been able to indulge in it, but the weather was so boisterous that they could not express their thoughts. It was hopeless to try and converse in the teeth of a full gale. The first few days were very trying, and the ship had to put back into Falmouth harbour. The Bishop suffered from continual sea-sickness. His mind was harassed by other considerations than those of a shipwreck, for he feared he might be taken prisoner by some French frigate. He remained all day hidden in his cabin, and it is said that on one occasion he disguised himself as a cook's mate in order to avoid recognition and the chance of being questioned. After sailing for several weeks in comparatively calm weather, the vessel reached the shores of America.¹ Talleyrand considered that he had been favoured by the weather on the whole. No sooner had he landed in Philadelphia than he wanted to proceed to Calcutta, and would have done so had not the skipper declined to take him, on the ground that he had no room. Philadelphia was not then the present beautiful and busy city, with a population of a million and a half, to which the produce of the two Americas flow together with those of Europe. Her inhabitants did not number sixty thousand in those days. The roads which led to it were very bad and very congested.² But even in the eighteenth century it was one of the most beautiful cities in the United States, built at right angles and consisting of brick houses decorated with white marble. It had wide pathways and avenues. Talleyrand met a Dutchman called Casenove, an intelligent but very timid and heedless

¹ The journey from Falmouth was accomplished in thirty-eight days.

² On his departure from Philadelphia in 1795, La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt made the following observations about its roads: "All the roads which lead to Philadelphia are destroyed, especially in the vicinity of the town, by huge market carts drawn by teams of four and six horses. Ridge Road is almost impassable."

man whom he had known in Paris. He stated in his memoirs that the qualities of Casenove proved most useful to him :—

“ As he never questioned me and never seemed interested in anything, I did not have to snub him, and in the absence of all advice and direction my intuition alone induced me to devote all my attention to the study of the vast picture that met my gaze. This I proceeded to do, when I had overcome the feeling of repugnance that filled my heart during the first few days.”

It was some years since he had heard Parisians exclaim, “ What should we be without America ? ” a query born of the general enthusiasm which the cause of independence had kindled. Now that he had reached her shores in spite of himself, he had ample time to trace the line of demarcation between what was real and purely imaginary. He felt no fear about his own position, but like all other French exiles its conditions were identical, whether he had remained in England or not. He had named those conditions in his letter of the 8th November, 1793, to Mme de Staël : “ We are doomed to spend several years with no other occupation than that of existing. If there was a counter Revolution in our favour we would, of course, take part in it, and if there was a Revolution of some other nature we should simply await its result.”

He exercised patience to the best of his ability and soon made his presence known to men of note. Among them was General Washington, from whom Alexander Hamilton solicited an audience in his behalf. He was the bearer of a letter of introduction from Lord Lansdowne, the wording of which was calculated to ensure for him the warmest reception. The British statesman highly honoured him as a dignitary of the Church, who had sacrificed his promotion in the Church and the interests of his worldly career to the common good. Washington was well informed of the real character of the late Bishop of Autun, and his information was anything but edifying ; but he would have acceded to his wish but for unexpected

difficulties which cropped up between the presenting of the request and the reply to it. Fate decreed that Talleyrand's steps should be dogged once more in Philadelphia by the same Jacobin patriot whose spite had been vented upon him in London, where he spied upon him, commented upon all his actions, which he interpreted in the worst possible sense, and hampered to the best of his ability. His actions, he said, were a disgrace to the French Republic.

Fauchet was his name, and he was Minister Plenipotentiary of the Committee of Public Safety, which had sent him to Philadelphia. He informed the Secretary of State that he could not continue to discharge his duties if a suspect like Talleyrand was granted access to the President of the United States, upon whom he would undoubtedly endeavour to exercise his baneful and unpatriotic influence. Such influence, he added, could only attenuate the good-will of the American Government towards that of France. Washington was careful to avoid all unnecessary friction with foreign powers and their representatives, and, urged by these political reasons, he felt compelled to refuse the request of the "illustrious French gentleman."

Talleyrand felt this rebuff the more keenly as it was quite unexpected. He was compelled to pass the door of the great American without ever crossing its threshold. He was more fortunate with General Hamilton, whom he considered to be one of the greatest statesmen in the world, without excepting Pitt and Fox. Hamilton was a man of mighty brain and great strength of character, and he showed Talleyrand every mark of affection and esteem.

He was anxious to study the country in which he had to reside and the character of those men who had implanted in its soil all the hopes of a free nation. This he did before analysing those positive considerations which were imposed on him by an almost empty purse. He had carefully noted at the onset the uncultivated appearance of the land, the scarcity of ready money (how things have

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changed!), and the extraordinary cost of all articles of luxury.

In Boston he observed that Italian straw hats cost two pounds, and fifty miles from Boston he witnessed a curious commercial exchange, that of a bull for six thousand feet of timber. From all this he deduced the fact that luxuries had reached the American shores long before the necessities of life.

As he walked along the banks of the Ohio, he entered a sort of dwelling called a log-house. As its name indicated, it was constructed of timber which had not been squared. It contained a drawing-room, and in the drawing-room was a piano, upon which he noticed some beautiful bronzes. When de Beaumetz opened the instrument their host exclaimed, "Oh, do not try to play upon it, as our tuner lives a hundred and fifty miles away and has not yet been here this year."

These strange contrasts proved that even in those early days America forsook refined culture in the pursuit of sordid business. Nine-tenths of the five hundred millions of acres in Western America were waste land. He was fond of making excursions through the woods, and once got lost in a dense forest which boasted of no roads. He was somewhat surprised to find himself there on horseback with only one companion, but he was still more surprised when in answer to his query, "Are you there, my friend?" the reply came, "Thank God, *my Lord Bishop*, I am quite close to you."

Towards the end of his life he seemed to hear the echo of the pious ejaculation when writing his memoirs. The "My Lord Bishop" recalled to him the memory of his defunct episcopate and caused him much merriment. Each day he noticed more peculiarities, and gradually pursued his studies further and deeper. He witnessed the creation and organisation of the commerce, industry, and government of a new country, and later on he extolled the value of such an experience to statesmen who were enabled to contemplate the confusion of old Europe from a distance.

Whether he occupied a modest inn or shabby lodgings, he was whetted by the desire to widen his horizon. Within the narrow walls of a little room he studied and devised great political schemes which were to settle the affairs of the world. He wrote frequently and at length to Lord Lansdowne and to Madame de Staël. He told them that to one who was separated from those in whose company he felt happiest, no greater comfort could accrue than that of observing and studying questions which must appeal to *their* attention and to their intelligence. He added that he derived further solace from imparting to them the results of his observations.¹ He proceeded to put theories into practice. To Lord Lansdowne he explained at length the causes of the relations which existed between America and England, and which were bound to do so. He explained the reciprocal dispositions of the two peoples which might be considered hostile by some, because of their violent separation. He laid stress upon the benefits that their common emulation would confer upon the world at large. With immense ability and foresight he discounted the true value of America's sentimental affection towards the French, whose alliance had greatly strengthened its hand, and in

¹ "I have carefully observed the social and political side of this country, a description of which I trust may interest you; I consign to you the result of my observations as I would send a collection of curiosities to a well-equipped museum" (Letter to Lord Lansdowne from New York, 1795).

His correspondence with Mme de Staël was of a much more intimate nature. He told her how eager he was to receive news from France, expressed his impressions of the day, his hopes of the morrow, and unfolded to her his money troubles, detailing at the same time the services he wanted her to render him. The tone of his letters would have led one to believe that his friendship for her was of a very deep and lasting nature.

Witness the following extracts :

"Your letter and that of Montmorency are the only ones which I have received since my arrival in America. They have indeed done me much good, for it is a long time since my poor heart had fed upon anything so sweet as the kind words you have written me. I have nourished it with the occupations of the mind, with ideas of fortunes to be made and speculations to be achieved. All this serves its purpose during a few quarters of an hour, but no more. Even Beaumetz holds little room in my heart, for his vanity is such that I readily understand why at the age of forty his oldest friends are really only acquaintances of eighteen months' standing" (12th May, 1794).

exchange for which the United States had almost taken up arms in defence of the generous allies who had crossed the Atlantic and fought with them under the banner of liberty.¹

Notwithstanding the LaFayettes and the Rochambeaus, the French and the Americans had neither habits nor interests in common. Modern economics have proved the accuracy of Talleyrand's opinion when he stated that racial affinities, the similarity of language, and, above all, common interests, were infinitely more powerful factors than those sympathies born of passing circumstances, such as the War of Independence. He asserted (and Lord Lansdowne endorsed his views) that in spite of the acute crisis which had recently occurred, America would remain truly English, and that England would still retain tremendous advantages over France, which would enable her to derive from the United States all the benefits that can accrue to one nation through the existence of another.

These splendid and weighty observations could only feed the marrow of his mind, and he soon became aware that his increasing wants needed a more substantial fare. As is the case now, the great question in America was to grow rich, and Talleyrand himself was always a great speculator. He was soon engaged in business and industrial operations which yielded him important material advantages.

During the summer, he had visited the Central and Northern States, where he found a wealth of crops and prairies and large tracts of beautiful and cultivated country situated in an area the possible yield of which was enormous. He studied the means of turning land into gold. Speculation in land was the order of the day, and was effected sometimes successfully, sometimes not. Several of his friends and fellow-countrymen were engaged in this pursuit. For instance, La Forest, the French Consul-General, had realised a fortune in 1792 by pur-

¹ The Comte Bosc, his third brother, was one of many noblemen who placed their swords at the disposal of the United States. In 1814 he became Field-Marshal of France and Governor of the Castle of Germain-en-Laye,

chasing a large estate in Virginia. The Duc de Liancourt kept him informed of his plans for establishing a model farm. Casenove, his Dutch friend, had formed a Dutch company with considerable success. M. de Blacons, the husband of Mme de Maulde and a late deputy, kept an inn in the newly formed Colony called "*Asylum*," whose rapid growth he had foreseen. It had received its allegorical name from its founders, MM. de Noailles and Omer Talon, who had hoped to realise their ambition by erecting a city upon the right bank of the Susquehanna. They entered into partnership with some inhabitants of Saint-Domingo, who, having escaped from the horrors of the Revolution, were wise enough to live modestly upon the remainder of their fortunes. They could not, however, resist the temptation of realising such rapid profits as would soon compensate them for the loss of their French estates, the more so as they saw their way to making money by providing a home for scores of French exiles, who did not know where to pitch their tents in this new country. They purchased two hundred thousand acres for $7\frac{1}{2}$ d. an acre, and they reckoned that before long each acre would be worth between five and six shillings. The price of purchase was settled, and they proceeded to clear the area which they had chosen as the cradle of the new city. The date upon which these two facts were accomplished was, they thought, the dawn of *Asylum's* prosperity.

Noailles undertook to represent the interests of the company in Philadelphia, while his friend Omer Talon proceeded to build log-houses and prepare them for the reception of their new occupants. They were doomed to suffer grievous disappointment before long. The necessary capital was not forthcoming; Morris and Nicholson, the two financiers who had helped them, were compelled eventually to buy up the whole of the *Asylum* Estate.

It is but fair to remember that at this time the development of land was only in its inception, and the atmosphere was laden with promising illusions. Talleyrand, too, hoped to provide homes for all his friends, and was just as sanguine as his fellow-refugees.

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On the 17th of October he wrote from Boston to Mme de Staël :

“ I clearly see the means of providing ample work for all of us who wish to drive chimeras for ever from their thoughts, and who at the close of this campaign will have ceased to believe in France or in the Foreign Powers.”

During the summer of 1794 he entered into partnership with Beaumetz. They purchased from General Knox, Secretary for War, a large property in the State of Maine, divided into building lots which were sold to emigrants. The speculation yielded a moderate profit, but quite sufficient to exercise the suspicious mind of the eternal Fauchet, who bitterly reported the fact to Paris :—

“ The operations of these shady speculators and all their hopes of success are based upon the misfortunes of their own country. They sincerely trust that the lack of good laws and of security to life and property under the Republic will urge a large portion of the French population to leave France as soon as peace is signed. This is the population whose advent they eagerly expect. In proof of this, I hold a letter written to Talleyrand by one heretofore Chevalier de Grasse, a refugee in London.”

This ultra-Jacobin, who became a zealous Prefect of the Empire, had a vivid imagination prone to harbour the most sinister conjectures.

Talleyrand did not confine his energies exclusively to the purchase and sale of land. His mind was not riveted to any definite course of speculation, but simply sought some means of growing rich. This was the frequent subject of his letters to Mme de Staël, whom he knew to be surrounded by exiles and refugees. They all hoped to obtain from her a solution of the unsatisfactory state of their finances. They were aware that Germaine Necker knew every financier in Europe, thanks to her father's position.

Talleyrand assured her that all her friends could entrust their interests to him, as he would farm them with good results, in consideration of a moderate commission.

His letters read like the circulars of a clever promoter.

He laid stress upon the fact that investors would be well advised to employ him sooner than American agents, whose honesty and loyalty did not offer the same guarantees. Here is a sample of his correspondence :

“Fortunes can be retrieved here quicker than anywhere else. I am in a position to execute your business on commission, and all such as may be entrusted to my care. If some of your father’s friends happen to be sending ships to America, or if you know any Swedes who are consigning goods to New York, Philadelphia, or Boston, I am in a position to cater for their interests with the utmost success. I beseech of you to exercise your energy in procuring such commissions for me. It would really be the act of a fool not to realise sufficient means in this new-born land, to make one independent of all future events. I can make a lot of money in a short time, by executing commissions on the purchase of Government Stocks or by that of Land and Property. The very questionable reputation of American merchants and business men has so far seriously hampered European shippers in the conduct of their affairs, that is why you will see the great advantages that must accrue to them from my proposals.”¹

In the meantime his mind soared to higher considerations, and he carefully watched the ardent and positive course of events which were to effect the creation of a rich and powerful Republic in Northern America.

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Boston, 14th of August, 1794.

We find the same expressions stated more positively in a letter addressed by him to the devoted friend, who he then said was the sole object of all his love. “My commonsense tells me that I must make a fortune so that my old age may not be hampered by want and by sordid considerations. I am haunted by these thoughts. So far I have not yet seen the light of day, though I realise that there is much money to be made, but only by those who have some. If you know people who want to speculate in the purchase of farms, I will take charge of their interests with the greatest pleasure. If I had a sufficient number of clients both they and I could make a great deal, because Americans cannot be trusted in business. Alone, I am helpless for the want of capital.” Self-advertisement, the assertion of his own merits, insinuations and statements against the probity of others, there is nothing lacking in the correspondence of M. de Talleyrand, which is couched in the orthodox terms, commonly used by self-seeking promoters.

As soon as he had exhausted this source of study, his thoughts turned once more to Europe. He had created occupations and distractions for himself in his residence of Third Street North, the shabbiness of which did not deprive him of the company of his friends, for luxury was an unknown quantity among the French Colony of Philadelphia. His correspondence was voluminous, and he paid frequent visits to his friends. Almost every evening he repaired to the back room of Moreau-Saint-Méry, who kept a bookshop, though he was a man of high birth and education. This shop was the trysting-place of Noailles, la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, Talon, and Volney. They enjoyed the good wine of Moreau's cellar. Talleyrand was the leader of the merry band, which at times became so boisterous that the mistress of the house had to exercise all her powers of persuasion to induce them to go home.¹

He enjoyed his freedom to the utmost, and often shocked the Philadelphians by walking arm in arm with a negress whose æstheticism had caught his fancy. This great nobleman who was to prove himself a martinet upon all questions of decorum, ignored all conventions in his endeavour to cheat the monotony of his prolonged exile. He had no intention, however, of remaining in Pennsylvania. He professed great admiration for the people of Washington (the wisest and happiest people in the world), who, he foresaw, would soon found a most powerful nation, but, for all that, he sighed for the day when he could return to his native land.

That day seemed long in coming, and as the atmosphere grew clearer in France, his need for his native air grew stronger and stronger. Every ship that landed from Europe bore tidings of the improved conditions of France. Her prisons had yielded up their captives ; terrorists were

¹ "Talleyrand would often make a start for home, but on reaching the courtyard at the bottom of my staircase, he would retrace his steps and prolong the sitting to the small hours of the morning. But he always retired as soon as my wife said to him, 'It is all very well for you, Monsieur, who can remain in bed to-morrow until midday, but remember that my friend will have to open the shop at seven o'clock'" (From the diary of Moreau Saint-Méry).

silent and in hiding, while the *moderates*, the “*constituants*,” and the Republicans of 1789 were back upon the scene of action. Words of justice and peace were spoken from the tribune of the National Convention. He wondered why he was still in Philadelphia. He had not wasted his time there no more than in New York and Boston, but it seemed to him an eternity since he had sailed from the French shores just thirty months ago. Phlegmatic though he was, he began to feel the hardships of exile, and he fell a victim to that sense of home-sick depression which Cicero, Bolingbroke, and Mme de Staël have declared to be the worst conceivable.

“I shall die if I remain here another year.” This was his statement to the hostess of Coppet, who fourteen years later expressed similar feelings to him: “I shall succumb if my weary pilgrimage does not end soon.” He knew that Mme de Staël was now the Swedish Ambassadors in Paris, and that many of their mutual friends had also returned. His one wish was to join them, and he only marvelled at ever having entertained the idea of settling in Denmark or of founding a colony in Louisiana. The political ambitions which he had recently denounced as chimeras now assumed a concrete form, and became realities as soon as he saw a chance of satisfying them.

There were many reasons, grave and futile, which urged him to terminate his enforced residence in America.

He wished to return to France, as he felt that a diplomatic career would afford him much better chances of retrieving his lost fortune than he could hope to find in commercial or agrarian speculations. Among the minor reasons which impelled him to forsake Washington’s countrymen was the keen esteem in which he held his digestive organs. They had been sorely tried by the culinary monotony of the American fare, which caused him to exclaim: “I found thirty-two different religions in the United States, *but only one dish*.” It was nearly three years since he had enjoyed the delightful luxury of sitting round a table laden with choice dishes and good wines, with refined and witty folk, whose conversation was

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kindled by the art of a first-class *chef* and the treasured vintages of a first-class cellar.

When could he return to Paris, there to dine, converse, and effect his purpose? This was the question to which he sought an answer by forwarding a formal petition to the Convention in which he related the fact that he had never emigrated, but had left France with a duly signed passport, as a delegate of the Government. He concluded by reasserting his warm devotion to the Republic, his patriotic feelings and his full adherence to the newly-born institutions of his country. His memoirs contain no reference to these eager protestations!

On the 18th Fructidor¹ Renaudes, the former Abbé, placed Talleyrand's petition upon the table of the House. It was backed by such friends as Chénier, at the generous request of Mme de Staël. His banishment² was cancelled by a decree of the 14th of September, 1795, but he had set sail in a Danish vessel before the document reached him. The crossing was begun in sunshine and terminated among icebergs. He had left France in a storm, and returned in a gale. He was confined to his cabin during the greater part of the journey. Eventually Hamburg was reached. It was then the banking-house of Europe, and he expected to meet a good many friends there. As the ship entered the harbour he was informed of the presence of Mme de Flahaut in Hamburg. He thought it would afford him a splendid opportunity of hearing all the news before returning to France. He conveyed to her his wish to see her. Mme de Flahaut had but a dim and frigid recollection of the one she called "The late one" in her letters to the Comtesse d'Albany. Moreover, she was about to be married again. His proposed visit frightened her. Before he had left the waters of the Elbe, she sent him an urgent request, which M. de Rice, a diplomat, was simple enough

¹ Fructidor was the twelfth month of the Republican calendar, from the 18th of August to the 16th of September.

² "The National Convention hereby enacts and decrees that Talleyrand Périgord, formerly Bishop of Autun, can return to French territory, and that his name be struck off the list of refugees. In consequence of which the said Convention annuls the indictment brought against him" (*Reports of the National Convention*, l. xix., 38).

to convey to him. It was nothing less than a peremptory order not to land, but to return forthwith to America. Talleyrand divined her motive for acting in this strange manner, declaring without any bitterness or malice that as she had been very attached to him, she feared lest he might prove an obstacle to her marriage with the Portuguese Minister in Paris. He remained a month in Hamburg, surrounded by friends who, like himself, had no intention of impeding the alliance which she eventually contracted with "the good Monsieur de Souza." Among them was Mme de Genlis, whom he found looking just the same as at Sillery, Bellechasse, and in England, because, as he said, "the stability of calm natures is due to their flexibility."

During his stay in Hamburg he lived at a sort of inn which had a glorious name, "L'Hotel de l'Empereur romain," and there he had a semi-amusing and semi-annoying adventure on the very eve of his departure.

One of his fellow-lodgers was a young man who wrote for hypothetical publishers. Talleyrand and he had conversed at table d'hôte upon current topics. The stranger was not slow to discover the refined tastes and sound judgment of the great statesman, and made bold to elicit his opinion upon a work of his which was still in manuscript form. Talleyrand acquiesced, much against his will, and took it up to his room, promising to read it in a few hours. He suddenly remembered that he had no ready money, and went out to draw fifteen louis from his bank, where his balance was particularly small. On returning that evening he kept his promise and opened the manuscript, but its perusal made him unusually sleepy, and he retired to bed, leaving his money between the leaves of the *magnum opus*. At six in the morning someone knocked, turned the key in the door, and entered his room. It was the author who had come to claim his manuscript, as he was about to sail. "Take it, and a pleasant journey to you," muttered the great man, half asleep. He discovered his loss on awaking. He never again set eyes upon the traveller or the fifteen louis.

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Others had to suffer the consequences of this mishap, for he swore on that day that never again would he read a manuscript for anyone.

Lente festinavit. From Hamburg he went to Amsterdam, where he spent a fortnight, proceeding hence to Brussels. In accordance with his arrangements, he reached Paris in September, 1796.

CHAPTER V

SOCIETY UNDER THE DIRECTOIRE

Talleyrand's surprise on his return to France—The existing social conditions—Strange changes in the respective customs of all classes, and also in the fashions of the day—Talleyrand makes the best of it all—His visits to the "Merveilleuses"—A sketch of Thérèse Tallien, of the handsome Caroline Hamelin, and of a third beauty of the day—The successes of Society women—Talleyrand's answer to Madame Dumoulin—Other social circles—The enormous influence of women under the Directoire—How Talleyrand succeeded in making the best use of it—Madame de Staël, the Directoire, and Barras—Her repeated efforts to obtain from the young "Director" the appointment of Talleyrand as Minister for Foreign Affairs—Three versions of the same incident, those of Barras, Talleyrand, and Madame de Staël—The true facts of the case—Talleyrand as Minister of the Directoire—His position proves less independent than he would have wished—He is precluded from effecting his one great object, the pacification of Europe—His first relations with Bonaparte—A description of the festivities held at the Hotel de Galliffet in honour of the Signatory of the treaty of Campo-Formio—Some interesting details concerning this function—How the campaign of Egypt originated—Talleyrand's initiative and complicity in the matter—His secret understanding with Bonaparte—An early interview preceded the latter's departure for Egypt—Talleyrand's return to Government departments—His leisure time—His official relations with Directorial society—The Luxembourg—Mme Tallien's cottage—Joséphine's mansion in the Rue Chantierine—"The constitutional ladies"—Talleyrand's downfall and his subsequent efforts to serve under another régime—Bonaparte's welcome return—The preliminary intrigues of the *coup d'état*—The overthrow of the Directoire, and the advent of Napoleon—Talleyrand's share in these events, and his intimate opinion about them.

BEFORE he had settled down in Paris, Talleyrand became aware of the great changes undergone by French Society before he left France for England, and England for America.

A greater surprise awaited the Refugees who, in 1815, returned from their long pilgrimage and realised, to their utter dismay, a radical change in men and things.

Though his nature and commonsense prevented him from being surprised at anything, he could not help feeling

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so when he became aware that Society, as he had known it, had been swept away by some powerful tidal wave. Its flotsam and jetsam lay so far apart that Talleyrand despaired of ever witnessing a return to the old order of things. These unheard-of upheavals had brought wealth to people who knew not how to make use of it. Former Duchesses were actually in the service of Princesses of finance whose origin was a myth. Huge fortunes had been made in a day upon the Stock Exchange. A gilded horde of vulgarians, whose coming had not been heralded in any way, bespattered the world with the splashing of their luxury, which was a grave insult to the misery of the nation. Individuals, social positions, rank, status, were classed and determined by no other rules than those of Chaos. A man of refined taste was bound to suffer acutely by having to submit to the jarring company of such a heterogeneous set, in which he was elbowed and jostled by upstarts who had jumped from the market-place into a gilded palace. Talleyrand had no time to waste in deploring the loss of what had ceased to be.

Barras was the master, and his mistress, Mme Tallien, was the idol of the people ; Mme Lange held second sway over the fashions and customs of the day.¹

Mesdames de Bussy, Hamelin, and de Vaulendon came next. The *salons* of the new school opened right on to the street. The Royal Palaces and aristocratic mansions were forsaken, and people met instead at Ranelagh, in fashionable confectioner's shops, or under the foliage of Idalia. The existing state of things was precarious and temporary ; the Revolution was crumbling to pieces, drifting hopelessly, and a change was near at hand. Such were the considerations that impelled Talleyrand to make the best of things, and to efface himself until refinement, good manners, breeding, and education obtained once more in the country of his birth.

¹ She was then at the zenith of her artistic career, which was about to end. Paris worshipped her to distraction, and she could not find room for the floral offerings and other presents which were daily lavished upon her. Her affections were quoted at the rate of £100 an hour.

His thirty months' sojourn in America had borne good fruit so far as social studies and useful meditations were concerned. But the lighter side of his nature had been considerably starved in that virtuous climate where he was unable to satisfy certain curiosities and tendencies ever dear to his human frailty. "The Bishop" had returned laden with heavy arrears of unsatiated joys. He came at an opportune time when the morals of France had run amok.

The citizens of the Directoire, and the good ladies of the year IV, joined forces with the greatest ease. Religion was a thing of the past, and only remembered as an obsolete institution which had been swept away by the Revolutionary torrent. Moral restraint was conspicuous by its absence, for it would have been difficult to enforce morals among those whose principles were so hazy that they queried the very existence of truth, virtue, or human dignity. Dancing, feasting, and carousing were the daily occupations of every class of society, whose one object was to enjoy life to the utmost. The doings of this insane period have been described by many pens. Suffice to say that morality was at its lowest ebb. The graces of old had discarded their veils, and, following their example, the women of the day yearned to adopt the costume woven of air which suited Venus so well, but the wearing of which is prohibited by stubborn prejudice and climatic reasons. "The Merveilleuses" exhaled an atmosphere of voluptuous complacency. They could hardly refuse to bestow charms so generously displayed whenever a scapegrace breeze divided the folds of this Directoire skirt, one side of which was always open to conviction. Clothed, semi-nude, almost nude, such was the progression of the day. Madame Hamelin had issued an edict against the wearing of chemises, which she described as antiquities doomed to disappear.¹ Corsets were discarded, while petticoats and neckerchiefs were seldom worn. In a word, fashions were never known to be so

¹ The "*sans-chemise*" did not wish to play a subordinate part to the "*sans-culottes*" (Peltier's *Life of Paris*, December, 1796).

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condescending. So true is this that a divinity of the day gave the following description of her toilette to an admirer who was to meet her that evening in a ball-room :—

“ You will recognise me by my green garters, the blue clocks on my stockings, and by my white satin shoes.”

It was indeed a strange period, when women occupying a box at the theatre seemed as though they were sitting in a bath. No hindrances were placed upon the path of love. Marriage was reduced to a civil contract, to be annulled at will, with the same facility as is almost enjoyed nowadays. Separations between husband and wife were not accompanied by tears and lamentations. They recovered their mutual liberty by paying a short visit to the local Town Hall.¹

It was a constant occurrence for two people of opposite sexes to meet in a drawing-room, and to bow and smile at each other, who, on the previous day, had lived under the same roof, but were in no way surprised to find themselves respectively wedded, the one to a new husband, and the other to a second spouse.

The condition of domestic morals can only be described in one word, anarchy. It gave rise to a few complaints, and all agreed that monotony was not a desirable thing, that Madame Tallien was a most beautiful woman, and that the aristocratic promenade known as the “ little Coblentz ” was a most delightful resort at five o'clock, when frequented by the “ Aimables ” and the “ Merveilleuses.”

¹ There were still some sensitive natures left, who did not look upon divorce as a trivial matter. Witness the following description of her own divorce which Julie Craeaau, Talma's wife, wrote to one of her fellow-actresses :

“ We drove to the Town Hall in the same carriage, and during the journey we talked upon general topics, like two friends going for a drive in the country. My husband helped me out of the carriage. We sat beside each other, and both signed our divorce contract as if it had been an ordinary document. He then accompanied me back to my carriage, and as he was about to take leave of me, I said to him, ‘ I hope that you will not altogether deprive me of your presence ; will you not come and see me sometimes ? ’

“ ‘ Certainly,’ he answered in a somewhat embarrassed tone, ‘ I shall do so with the greatest pleasure.’

“ I was as white as a ghost, and trembling like a leaf.”

(*Souvenirs of an Actress*, by Louise Fush, vol. ii.)

Talleyrand frequented this questionable set, and took part in its licentious pleasures, whenever his occupations enabled him to do so. He entered into its life, but in doing so he was always restrained by his refined tastes and self-respect. He did not frequent public balls, preferring to meet the Queens of pleasure in their own homes, where he derived phlegmatic amusement from their strange doings and surroundings. His presence at Madame Tallien's tea-parties was dictated both by gallant and political motives. Terezia Tallien, the beautiful Hamelin, and the interesting Elise Moranges, were the three graces whom he often met in those social circles which he was compelled to frequent, thanks to the faulty education of the period. They were certainly much appreciated, for as soon as they appeared they were surrounded by a bevy of so-called equeries, who were all aspirants to their favours. The "citizeness" Tallien had been known as Thérèse Cabarus, and as Madame de Fontenay, and was destined to become the Princesse de Chimay. Her name was mentioned daily at dinners, tea-parties, in the Press, and at social gatherings. The perfection of her lines, of her arms, her neck and shoulders, were severely criticised by Feydeau's lady friends. Slanderers of the same school were ever busy relating the latest anecdotes concerning her hospitable alcove, her intrigues, her caprices that lasted but a day or a night. They commented severely upon her unblushing liaison with Barras. Slanders, libels, and calumnies were born each day, but they withered at her feet, those pretty feet that rested upon piles of gold. What did she care? She had long since ceased to be Thérèse, the wife of Cabarus the conventional, the woman whom Bordeaux had seen standing on a chariot, wearing a red cap, and carrying a pike in her hand. She had forgotten these emblems now that she gazed upon the glittering rivers of diamonds that encircled her and glittered upon her breast. She was the reigning Cleopatra of the Directorial Republic, the fairy of the Luxembourg, who, with a wave of her graceful wand,

dispensed favours and governed the kinglets who thought they ruled Paris and the whole of France.

The great ambition of Caroline Hamelin was to wrench from her the suzerainty of fashion and of influence. This Caroline was as sensitive and as sentimental as a créole,¹ romantic at times, and full of intrigue, a beautiful dancer, with an enchanting figure, with a most perturbing appearance and exquisite teeth, whose beauty and whiteness would have claimed forgiveness for any gluttony of which they had been guilty. Her ambition was not satisfied, however. She wanted to play a more important part in the world. She only cared for the society of men in high position and was keenly interested in the world of politics. It was said of her that as soon as she had received the confidences of one statesman, she betrayed them to his rival for the sake of love or lucre. She numbered among her regular visitors such men as Ouvrard the financier, and Chateaubriand, the Defender of the Throne and of the Altar. It would indeed have been a pity if Talleyrand had not been one of this select party. Elise Moranges was the third and least important of these three "Merveilleuses." Talleyrand had previously met her at a most propitious time, when her heart was untenanted, but he had not seized the opportunity. He regretted the fact now that he beheld her so graceful, so attractive and so stylish. He enjoyed pleasant hours contemplating the graceful evolutions of the beautiful Hamelin as she danced the gavotte, or dining at Madame Tallien's, between the sensitive Elise Moranges, and the deceptive Julia Bernard, the most virginal of coquettes, who had received an angelic education in the Convent of the Holy Blood before going through the form of marriage, for appearance sake only, with Récamier the banker, ere she had reached her eighteenth summer. Later on in the evening he would join the society of intellectual men such as Montrond, christened the Luttrell of Paris by Sydney Smith, Dorin-

¹ She was a coloured créole from Saint Domingo, possessed of all the lascivious grace of a mulatress.

ville, who often obliged with an improvised madrigal, and Narbonne, the daring and brilliant conversationist.

Talleyrand's contribution consisted of sensible insinuations and witty repartees.

He was then forty-two or forty-three years of age. His bearing was haughty, his eyes inanimate. He spoke or remained silent at will, and in this ambiguous society his distinguished manners and great dignity proved great attractions. Years had fallen lightly upon him, for not a single wrinkle could be seen upon his juvenile features. His grey-blue eyes were as penetrating as ever when he chose to exercise their power. Even his halting gait was admired by many, who said that it lent an air of gravity in accordance with his nature. He wore the clothes of a "Merveilleux" of the time, the fantastic costume of the Directoire adopted by his friends Montrond and André d'Arbelles. The former Abbé Maurice looked very becoming with the powdered wig, the high cravat, the ear-rings, the tail coat, and the short breeches of 1797. His main success in this frivolous company was due to the art of making love, and the refined manners which he had learnt under the old régime, but the teaching of which was neglected in the school at which the gallants of the Revolution had been trained.

The society belles admired the characteristic strength of his features, which expressed both nonchalance and malice. They were duly impressed by his appearance, his well-shaped head, refined, powdered and perfumed, and they were mated by his daring, impertinent, and absorbing conversation. At times he met with more success than he desired. He was leaving Mme de Staël's drawing-room one night when Mme Dumoulin, the wife of an army contractor, exclaimed with ecstasy that she could never refuse anything to such a charming man, and, moreover, that he would have no need to solicit her favours very long. She was true to her word, and displayed much generosity towards him, but his gratitude did not endure, as proved by the following conversation between the shepherd and shepherdess :

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It took place during a reception in his own house which, as usual, was numerously attended. Garat had just sung a popular ballad with his wonted fire. All the women present were deeply moved, especially La Dumoulin, who seemed transported by voluptuous tenderness. She sought her host in the midst of a group of men, and exclaimed, "Oh, my dear old friend, what a wonderful singer is this man!"

Talleyrand considered the epithet too familiar: "I may be your old friend, Madame, but I am certainly your young adorer, for I think that our mutual love has not lived a week."

He had spoken in a low tone, but Narbonne and Montrond overheard his remark, which provided much merriment to Paris.

There were no more select circles, but there were still pleasant houses where well-bred folk could meet and converse. The flowers of politeness were not quite withered, though their death was mourned. Society was not so chaotic as heretofore, and a more definite position was assigned to its members. It was quite evident that Madame Angot was no more the supreme ruler. Luxury was better ordained. A few strayed sheep of the old aristocracy, who had lost caste, and were compromised by certain adventures with Jacobins which they had not been able to avoid because they wished to save their heads and to live, were now seen at the Luxembourg receptions. They had preserved their qualities of grace and elegance, and therefore lent great distinction to those receptions. In a word, the Directoire was becoming refined, but remained what it was throughout its short and weird destiny, a blissful period for all women. They remained in evidence, and never before or since did women dispose of such manifest influence, save, perhaps, during the days of the Fronde.¹

They were quite right to use it and abuse it, for the time was near at hand when the iron will of a soldier of

¹ La Fronde was the name of the Party which rebelled against Mazarin and the Court during the minority of Louis XIV. (Adapter's note.)

fortune was to put a stop to this delightful order of things. Meanwhile they breathed freely under a régime of toleration in which the charm of their voice seduced and mated men in power, whose power astounded themselves. It was through women that preferment, commands, and livings could be obtained. It was to them that refugees applied for the restitution of some of their patrimony, and the permission to return to France. So busy were they kept that they had barely sufficient time to do justice to their toilettes and to their love affairs. The surest way to obtain favours or redress was to get the ear of Joséphine, who received generous gifts of money and of other things from Barras, when she lived in her little country-house at Croissy. Another path which led to success was to be found through the boudoir of the beautiful Térézia Cabarus of Thermidor.¹ The two women were the willing slaves of Barras at one and the same time, until he handed over Térézia, the handsomer, but more expensive of the two, to Ouvrard the financier, reserving unto himself the right to worship at her shrine when the spirit moved him. As to Joséphine, who was of a more frivolous and more passionate nature, she, of course, found salvation in the arms of Bonaparte.

Barras received many requests from both of them in behalf of their friends, and the *petit lever* of the Director was attended by a bevy of most obliging ladies, who one and all had something to obtain from him.

He was daily bombarded by solicitations of all sorts. A daring, boisterous, immoral man, venal, prodigal, and sometimes mercenary in the bestowal of his protection, he was known to be essentially good-natured at heart, heedless, imprudent in the investments of his affections, but serviceable withal, and always ready to give a leg-up to those who had been unhorsed by misfortune or by their own clumsiness. He did not know how to resist, for he was either mated by the allurements of a pretty woman, or by the hope that his reward would be com-

¹ Thermidor, the eleventh month of the Republican Calendar, from July 19th to August 17th. (Adapter's note.)

mensurate with his services. Madame de Chastenay, a former nun, obtained from him the appointment of Réal as Government Commissary for the Department of the Seine. Joséphine de Beauharnais successfully begged of him to give Bonaparte the command of the army of Italy, and it was thanks to the warm pleadings of Mme de Staël that Talleyrand received from him the portfolio of Foreign Affairs. This last appointment was certainly based upon equity. It was the strange fate of Barras to strengthen the hand of Bonaparte and Talleyrand, the two ambitious tyrants who were to prove his undoing, and eventually hurl him from power.

Since his return to France, the Bishop of Autun had not wasted his time or his talents, all of which contributed to make his life pleasant, but his existence was stripped of glory and of power. It is true that he was a bright and shining light at the Academy of moral science, which had thrown open its doors to him, but this did not satisfy a mind like his, the mind of a voluptuous Epicurean, who yearned to be the master of all men.

Madame de Staël strained every nerve in the interests of the friend whose ambition she was eager to satisfy. We have already described her efforts to facilitate his return to France. As soon as he was back, she proceeded to obtain a position worthy of him. It was with this intention that she called upon General Barras in the second week of July, 1797.

That Barras was Mme de Staël's only friend among the five members of the Directoire, and that the remaining four were as ill-disposed towards her as the committee of twelve had proved to be, is a most important point to be remembered in her political life. She had just returned, having been sent into exile by the same Directoire, so that she might meditate at her ease upon the influence of passions.¹ Her misfortunes had begun

¹ We refer to the famous work upon which she was engaged, *The Influence of Passions upon the Happiness of Men and Nations*. She had hoped that it might effect much influence upon the Directoire. She called it the testament of her mind, and bequeathed it to posterity so that posterity might remember her name. "I want to finish it

before that, and were doomed to last another fifteen years, owing to Napoleon's inveterate animosity. The Convention had noted her goings and comings in behalf of the refugees, and had informed her that her presence in Paris should not be prolonged, as she might find it a very unhealthy residence before long. She was the object of a furious attack in the Assembly by the Deputy Legendre, and she was formally ordered to leave. This order was rescinded, however, through the efforts of her husband, the Swedish Ambassador, but nevertheless she realised that it was henceforth impossible for her to remain in Paris.

As soon as the new régime was constituted she thought that she could return to her mansion in the Rue de Grenelle with all the honours of war, but her hopes were soon dashed to the ground by the action of Cochon de Lapparent, the Police Minister, who spent his days and nights inventing conspiracies with the sole object of denouncing them. He was seconded by the famous Merlin de Douai, a crafty lawyer, and they both decided that as she was a foreigner she should not be allowed to return to France. She was informed that a provisional warrant had been obtained for her arrest. This was done because the authorities learned that she meant to cross the frontier, and was loud in her denunciation of this unjust clause concerning her nationality. Moreover, it was said that Coppet, the residence of the Baronne de Staël (Fille Necker) was a hotbed of conspiracy against the Directoire).¹

before I am thirty, and then to die, known to all and mourned by some."

On the 20th of August, 1796, she wrote to Roederer, "You will soon receive a work of mine, for which I solicit your able concurrence."

¹ "22nd of April, 1796 (3rd Floréal, year IV: or eighth month of the Republican Calendar).

"The executive Directoire has become aware that the Baronne de Staël has been actively corresponding with emigrant conspirators, and with the greatest enemies of the Republic, and that she has taken part in every plot hatched against the peace of the State. As it has also come to the knowledge of the Directoire that she is about to return to France, with the object of kindling fresh trouble, it hereby decrees that the Baronne shall be arrested if she crosses the frontier, and shall be brought before the Minister of Police, who shall interrogate her and transmit his report to the said Directoire. The present decree shall not be printed" (National Archives, F. 76, 608).

The detective Rousselet had been told off to follow her, and if necessary to arrest her and seize all papers and documents in her possession. His mission¹ was never accomplished. She soon grew calmer and more circumspect, but did not relax in her endeavours to return. The police supervision had ceased, and at last her request was granted. She returned to Paris, where once more she led society, surrounded by her friends and by her dear Benjamin Constant, whose absence and projected marriage had caused her much anxiety. On the 29th of January, 1797, she wrote the following letter to Roederer : " M. de Talleyrand will bring you here, and then you can see for yourself what an exile looks like. Persecution is such a commonplace thing in times of revolution, but it only affords a harvest of sufferings, stripped of all honour."

Her natural turbulence and passionate temperament compelled her to rush once more into the thick of party strife. The decree of the 5th Floréal,² relating to her nationality, had not yet been abrogated, and hung like a sword over her head. It caused her some anxiety, no doubt, but she felt more secure now that she possessed, or thought she possessed, the friendship of Barras, in whose private study she daily pleaded the cause of Talleyrand.

The ardent Mme de Staël did not spare her efforts, but she found it hard to convince her protector. We now come to the version given by Barras of the many efforts made by Mme de Staël in favour of the defaulter of the 18th Brumaire.³ It is full of flagrant inaccuracies, and betrays the anger and resentment of the writer towards

¹ It was very near having direful results for the ex-Ambassadress, as is proved by the following letter, which was written in a state of great emotion :

" I am weary unto death ! I have just had as narrow an escape as that of the gentlemen of the Directoire themselves. My horses galloped faster than ever they did before, and I was truly frightened, but, thank Heaven, I am safe, and anxious for news of you " (National Archives, A. F. 111, 363).

² Eighth month of the Republican Calendar, from April 20th to May 20th.

³ Second month of the Republican Calendar, from October 23 to November 21.

Talleyrand, whose cause was pleaded in the name of personal friendship and in virtue of all the good that would result from his nomination. The very brief exposition of the same subject written by Talleyrand will follow that of Barras.

The eloquent Madame de Staël continued her pleadings, forgetting that she was not held in odour of sanctity in the charmed circle in which so many prejudices prevailed against her protégé and herself. She urged that Talleyrand found himself in a very difficult position, both morally and materially, and that it would be an act both of justice and of wisdom to confer upon him some public office which would enable him to serve the Republic and to live. Barras listened, but he still demurred. A secret presentiment warned him that he would not promote his own interests by helping this "fresh arrival," as he described him in that weird jumble of extravagant imagination, of rancours and of truths, known as his diffuse memoirs.

The Directoire's mistrust of Talleyrand was founded upon very good reasons. He had spared no efforts to prove his affection towards Barras, to whom he had sent Benjamin Constant as ambassador. He had used every means to strengthen his claim, and having exhausted the help of men, he fell back upon his usual forces and called upon his women friends to storm the citadel. He had founded the Constitutional Club, in which he was suspected of carrying on many intrigues, making allies of all its members, reminding the friends of Mme de Staël that he had remained what he was in 1789, testifying to his sympathy towards the Gironde when addressing the Girondins, telling the Dantonists that it was Danton who had sent him to England, and remaining on the best of terms with those Jacobins whose conversion was by no means certain. Madame de Staël was a persevering advocate, and she gave Barras no rest until he had promised her to see Talleyrand. "You had better see him to-night at nine o'clock," said the devoted friend, who did not wish to lose a minute.

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At the appointed time she introduced the candidate into the presence of the "Director," who thought he beheld Robespierre as he gazed upon the pallid features, the dim eyes and studied other details of Talleyrand's physiognomy. His judgment was biased by a feeling of retrospective hatred, and he was fatuous enough to think that the merits of the candidate were inferior to his own. Talleyrand was far too able not to interpret the sentiments entertained towards him, or to show that he was aware of them. He expressed himself in complimentary periphrases, asserting his devotion, his gratitude, and his admiration. Having baulked the main issue, he saluted and retired, accompanied by his Ambassadors. Before leaving she had time to whisper in a low tone: "General" (she always called him "General," to please him), "I have not been able to say much to you about citizen Talleyrand, fearing to shock his modesty. I can only do so in his absence, and I ask you to give me a full audience to-morrow." She returned the next day and attacked her subject *cap-à-piè*. She related with eloquence the life of Talleyrand from the days of his sad youth and compulsory education. She asserted that he had never been a priest by conviction, and that she did not even know whether he believed in God. He had, however, served the cause of liberty and the Revolution without excess or violence. She knew no one better fitted to foster the interests of the country by seconding the personal qualities of courage, strength of character, and stern sense of justice possessed by Paul Barras himself. She was so carried away by her defence of him that she even invoked the moral imperfections of her candidate as valuable assets which could be used with considerable advantage.

"Yes," she said (though it is likely she expressed herself in less clumsy terms than those quoted by Barras), "Talleyrand has all the defects and vices of the ancient and new régimes. He has and will always keep a footing in all parties. This makes his concourse all the more precious."

"Well, what do you want me to do for this dear Talley-

rand of yours? Please explain what you wish me to make of him!"

"First of all, a Cabinet Minister, and, at the very least, a Minister of Foreign Affairs."

He mentioned the matter to his colleagues. Talleyrand's chances seemed very poor at first, for both Carnot and Barthélémy were decidedly hostile to him, while Rewbell entertained feelings of fierce animosity towards him. Barras had no sooner made his suggestion than Rewbell burst forth full of indignation and horror. He gave full vent to his hatred for Talleyrand. "He is the quintessence of starched nonentity and the incarnation of roguery."

The other members of the Directoire had reached the same pitch of violence. Talleyrand's presence at the Constitutional Club was a source of irritation and anxiety to the Government: "He is the eagle among birds of ill omen," concluded Rewbell, an unpleasant gentleman, forsooth, who in his big head revolved ideas of sublime contempt concerning the rest of humanity.

"What was said, what was done?" exclaimed Mme de Staël, in a state of fever, as she rushed in to Barras. She spoke and insisted upon her points with a degree of eloquence that she had not yet displayed. She wrung him by the hands, urged him, nudged him, until she placed him in a very awkward predicament. So great was her excitement that the condition of her toilette became greatly disarranged. Her bodice was unfastened, displaying the immaculate whiteness of her panting breasts. Had she prepared the desired effect in order to secure triumph? It matters little whether she was aware or not of the disorder. She had but one thought. Talleyrand must be a Minister. He soon became one, and thus her most earnest wish was satisfied. The foregoing exposition is practically that given by Barras, though we have expressed it with more regard for polite language, and with the desire to avoid exaggerations.

Barras had but one wish, to justify the promotion of the late Bishop to Cabinet rank, and to set

forth as fulsomely as possible the pressure brought to bear upon him by Madame de Staël, Benjamin Constant, and the candidate himself. We now come to the concise and guarded account of Talleyrand. Barras the southern must have imagined words that were never spoken, gestures that were never used, and grovelling poses that were never assumed towards him by Talleyrand or Mme de Staël.

What is the true version, we wonder ! Barras states in his memoirs that four consecutive attempts were made before he consented to act. On the other hand, Talleyrand would feign make one believe that the portfolio was offered to him, that he hesitated to accept it because of the existing confusion of political parties, but that he finally did so, after due reflection. Barras asserts that Madame de Staël assured him, in a fit of hysterical emotion, that her friend was penniless, dishonoured, lost, and decided to throw himself into the river, if he did not find some means of existence, in other words, if the generous " Director " did not forthwith appoint him a Minister.¹

Talleyrand relates without apparent malice that it was Barras who seemed very ill at ease in his presence. He adds that when he dined with him in his little house at Suresnes, Barras was overcome upon learning the death of one of his relatives, and that he cried, sobbed, and frantically embraced his guest. He had only known him two hours, but Talleyrand felt convinced that he must be the human being whom Barras loved best in the world.

It is interesting to peruse the third testimony which will prove once more the difficulty of obtaining an accurate knowledge of historical facts, when the interested parties relate them with such flagrant contradictions. Mme de Staël was outspoken without being vivacious, and she never admitted that she had visited Barras. She had certainly worked for Talleyrand, because she felt that his

¹ It is not true that Talleyrand was reduced to such poverty on his return from America. It is more likely that he was still engaged in profitable speculations, and that he had money invested in several foreign banks.

merits would enable him to render the Government great services as a diplomat.¹

She had, however, trusted to the services of a friend to lay the matter before Barras.

It seems necessary to seek and find the truth by analysing these three versions of the same fact upon which such divergent statements have been made by their authors. Doubtless Talleyrand had sought the earliest opportunity of gaining access to public life under the existing régime. Madame de Staël had come to his rescue with her usual fervour. Barras was threatened at this time, when multiple intrigues had almost secured his arrest, and he thought it useful to himself to include his newly acquired friend in the forthcoming Cabinet, with such results as are common knowledge.

His action afforded him brief and temporary satisfaction, to be followed by bitter disappointment. His colleagues acquiesced in the appointment of Talleyrand, because of his numerous and useful relations in Europe, because his intimacy with Choiseul and Vergennes had enabled him to probe the depths of diplomacy, and because no other man in France possessed a clearer insight than his. Such attributes were needed at a time when Europe was in a state of confusion, and when the new order of things conceived by the drastic national up-

¹ "Talleyrand had returned from America the year before the Fructidor [twelfth month of the Republican Calendar, August 18th to September 16th].

"All honest men wished to see peace proclaimed in Europe, and the time had come when the various belligerents were anxious to effect a settlement. I thought that M. de Talleyrand would prove, as he did ever afterwards, a most able negotiator. The well-wishers of the Directoire hoped to see it strengthened by constitutional means, and were anxious to secure the services of men strong enough to uphold the Government. M. de Talleyrand was prepared to accept the portfolio of Foreign Affairs, and was best fitted to discharge the duties of the post. I served him with all my might, and secured for him an introduction to Barras through the medium of a friend of mine. M. de Talleyrand needed help in order to reach power, but he was well able to retain it without the concurrence of his friends. My efforts to secure his appointment represent the only part I played in the crisis which preceded the 18th Fructidor, and which I did my very best to avert, hoping that M. de Talleyrand might succeed in conciliating the contending parties" (Madame de Staël, *Considerations upon the Revolution*).

heaval of 1789 could only bear fruit under the guidance and with the help of men of his calibre.

He wrote the following letter to Mme de Staël on the day he was appointed. It only partially expresses his joy at having realised his dearest object :

“ I am again a Minister, and am glad of the fact for certain reasons, but sorry in many ways. To be a Minister does not mean perfect bliss. I will come to see you this evening. Many thanks for the extract which you sent me.”

On the following day he went to thank Barras at the Luxembourg, and on the 28th of November he succeeded to Charles Delacroix at the Foreign Office.

He had become a Minister by common consent, having been “ Ministerial ” at the very onset. He forthwith assumed the bearing and appearance of his functions, as if to supplement by his own authority the lack of breadth and initiative due to the jealous susceptibilities of those in power. Talleyrand overawed the world by the natural and simple dignity inherent to him, even when he affected heedless, intimate and homely manners. Later on he recalled all this with satisfaction :

“ I was a Minister under the Directoire, and all the hob-nail boots of the Revolution trod upon my carpets, but not a single plebeian ever tried to be familiar with me.”¹

One of his first official communications was the diplomatic circular, in which he undertook to explain the *coup d'état* of the 18th Fructidor to the Cabinets of Europe. He stated therein that though the repression had been severe, it had not been cruel, and that it was put in force against the monarchists and traitors suborned by the foreigner. He added that had the assailants of the

¹ There were certain exceptions, however, which he preferred to forget. Rewbell was hardly polite or considerate when he concluded a violent discussion by hurling an ink-bottle at Talleyrand's head, as he exclaimed, “ You vile refugee, your conscience is as crooked as your foot.” This insult should not have come from Rewbell, who was afflicted with a dreadful squint. Talleyrand had his revenge later on, for each time Rewbell asked him how things were going on, he replied, “ Crooked, sir, as you see.”

Government been successful, they would have not used a lighter hand in dealing with their enemies. Pichegru, the exile, did not mince his words about it :

“ If we had won the day, the Revolutionists would not have been let off with transportation for life.”¹

The 18th Fructidor was followed by a series of revolutionary outbursts in Western Europe, in Ireland, in Holland, on the Rhine, in Piémont, at Rome, and at Naples, so that, to quote Michelet, “ France appeared in all the Majesty of a Republican Mother surrounded by her daughters.”

These Republics were but flitting shadows, doomed to vanish at the very first disturbance. Talleyrand endorsed the policy of the Directoire by endeavouring to justify the victory of the Republican Party over the Royalists in the remarkable dispatches he addressed to the French representatives abroad :

“ You will say that, thanks to its courage, its liberal views, and the impenetrable secret which heralded its success, the Directoire has mastered the art of governing under the most difficult circumstances.”

While ably defending a tottering régime of which he was the mainspring, he looked into the future and followed with great interest the victorious course of the future head of France across the plains of Italy. The views which he enforced in his department coincided with the principles adopted in 1796, when the Armies of the Republic had liberated a National Territory, and thrown back its frontiers to the extreme boundaries traced by nature long before Bonaparte had appeared upon the scene. He had enforced those same views and applied those same principles when the Revolution had to withstand the attack of a coalised Europe, and he wished to see them recognised as just and fair, both under the Directoire and after the Directoire.

What more could be wished for than the acquisition of

¹ The Directoire was reproached with excessive meekness towards the Royalists who boasted of their alliance with the English. La Réveillière insisted that they should be spared, notwithstanding the contrary advice given by Barras and General Augereau.

Savoy and the possession of Belgium, which had now returned to France as the last and precious shred of the appanage of Marie de Bourgogne? Was not the territory of France vast enough and comprehensive enough in its harmonious composition?

It had reached the terminal point which was deemed desirable, having regard to the just measure of the country's strength and to its true greatness.¹ A further expansion would only distort the beautiful natural proportions of the country and inaugurate a policy of conquest, with its inevitable reactions. Nevertheless, the impetus had been given. The course of events was a rapid one. They told more forcibly than the most cogent reasons of State. Beyond the Alps, the Commander of the Army of Italy was carrying out a successful military campaign. Upon that soil, eternally coveted for most problematic reasons, he had renewed the numerous attempts of the Kings of France, from Charles VIII to Louis XIV. So brilliant was the effect of these feats of arms that they almost fascinated the prudent Talleyrand.

He had become Minister during the time which elapsed between the peace preliminaries at Leoben and the signature of the treaty of Campo-Formio. Bonaparte had congratulated the Directoire and addressed to Talleyrand a most flattering letter, although he had never seen him. This was the beginning of their relations. They continued to correspond, for Talleyrand was a past master in the art of praising and of acknowledging praise. His flattering phrases addressed to the Conqueror remind one of the incense burnt by Voltaire at the feet of Frederick the Great.²

¹ Vergennes said in 1784: "Constituted as she is, France has more reason to fear aggrandisement than to wish for it. Her extension would place a weight upon her frontiers which would weaken her centre."

² "I have the honour to inform you, General, that the Directoire has appointed me its Minister for Foreign Affairs. While shrinking from assuming duties, the vast importance of which I so fully realise, I gather courage when I think of the immense facilities for negotiation which your glorious conquests will afford to my country and to myself."

The meaning of his expressions was far-reaching, and betokened the Courtier whose instinct forewarned him of the coming of the Master.

The Republican Government did not contemplate with much pleasure the host of interests and ambitions grouped around Bonaparte. Lazare Hoche was dead, and he was the only man who could have checked the counter Revolution. He had realised and pointed out the danger of the star that was rapidly ascending upon the horizon of Italy. The recall of Bonaparte to Paris had been mooted before the victory of Castiglione was known, but the commander of the Army of Italy was soon beyond the reach of his would-be Masters, thanks to his subsequent brilliant feats and to the providential help received by him at critical moments from such able and silent Generals as Masséna. The same men who feared him were now compelled to crown him with their praises, and to greet him as a triumphant hero.

Having signed the treaty of peace with Austria at Campo-Formio, Bonaparte put in an appearance at the Congress of Rastadt, where a few litigious questions were discussed by the representatives of the French Republic and of the Empire. He then proceeded to solicit fresh instructions, a second Army and a new field of action, knowing full well that the memory of Paris was a short one, and that he was well advised to strike the iron of success upon the anvil of popularity.¹

He had no sooner arrived than he sent his aide-de-camp to the Foreign Office which had so ably seconded him at Campo-Formio. He wished to know when it would be convenient for him to see Talleyrand. The latter replied that he would await the General at his

I shall not fail to convey to you all the views and opinions which the Directoire may deem fit to bring to your knowledge, and *La Renommée*, your organ in the Press, will often rob me of the joy of telling my Government how nobly and valiantly you have complied with its wishes. . . ." (Unpublished and official correspondence of Napoleon Bonaparte with the Directoire and its Ministers. Paris, 1819, 7th Volume in 8vo).

¹ Mallet Du Pan was an able man, but he rashly discounted the coming end of Bonaparte's career. It was he who said, "This sulphurous-headed Scaramouch is finished, absolutely finished."

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convenience, and an appointment was made for eleven o'clock the following day. When Bonaparte arrived he found several people whom Talleyrand had invited. The Minister rose to meet the Commander-in-Chief, and crossing the drawing-room, he introduced him to Mme de Staël. Bonaparte paid little heed to her, as he did not care for loquacious women. He was much more interested in Bougainville the navigator and geographer, to whom he spoke most affably. Incipient friendships are always attended with honey and suavity.

On both sides the interview proved highly successful. Talleyrand was fascinated by the youthful face that testified to twenty victories by its pallor and its weary looks.

Bonaparte was most expansive and confiding, and expressed his great pleasure at having been able to commune with someone who was *not* a member of the Directoire. So much for his gratitude towards Barras, who had guided his first steps on the road to glory ! He had forgotten this fact in his desire to single out Talleyrand from the company of those from whom he meant to divorce him before long.

There were many just and natural reasons why the Directoire should hesitate to extend a joyous greeting to a Commander whose title of General might soon be transformed into that of Dictator. He had recently delivered a brief address under the windows of the Luxembourg, in the course of which he stated that France might stand in need of new Institutions before very long. It was little wonder, therefore, that the Government of "The Five" demurred at following him in a triumphant progress which might harbour drastic and unpleasant surprises. Talleyrand was not hampered by similar fears. He gave a great reception in the *salons* of the Ministry in honour of Bonaparte's victories in Italy and of the glorious treaty of peace which had just been signed. In his heart and soul he knew full well the real value of such a peace which merely produced a lull between two antagonistic nations. He had himself come to invite the General in his little

house in the Rue Chantereine. Bonaparte and Joséphine were at home that day, and their drawing-room was too small to contain the brothers in arms, writers, and politicians who had come to pay them their respects. Among them was Arnault le Tragique, a poet and a great friend of Bonaparte. Talleyrand engaged him in a long conversation upon various literary subjects, and expressed his opinion in clear and concise terms about the philosophers of the eighteenth century, including Chamfort. Arnault was surprised to hear him depreciate the talent of Chamfort, who had recently been most useful to him.

It is possible that the Bishop of Autun had resented some indiscretion on the part of the man who looked upon Talleyrand as the obliging interpreter of his (Chamfort's) opinions.

Talleyrand did not fail to invite Arnault to the gala function which was to take place at the Hotel Galliffet, in honour of his illustrious friend. The élite of Paris was present at the ball and at the supper. The Ministerial galleries had been decorated with the utmost luxury and in the best of taste. The host was universally congratulated upon the artistic success of his efforts, for he had personally supervised and directed the decoration and disposition of the mansion. Among his guests was a successful upstart, who had a right to be there, since she was the wife of M. Merlin de Douai, one of the five Sovereigns of the Republic.

“ This must have cost you a lot of money, Citizen Minister ? ”

“ Yes, madame, but Peru would have cost me more.”

The short conversation was repeated all over Paris the next day.

The arrival of Bonaparte attracted a tremendous crowd of inquisitive and jostling people, who rushed to meet him.

Seizing the arm of his poet friend, he whispered to him:

“ I see here a number of intruders who mean to beset me, but they will not dare to interrupt our conversation. Let us walk through the room, and just tell me the names of these mountebanks.”

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It was in vain that he tried to avoid the peril, for he was soon hemmed in by the surging crowd, in the midst of which Vincent Arnault was greeted by Mme de Staël. This meeting between the Thalestris and the Alexander of those times caused the unfortunate incident of the evening, inflicting upon the vanity of the lady a wound which was never forgotten.

“One cannot get near your General,” she said, “but *you must* introduce me to him.”

Arnault would have liked to decline the honour, knowing Bonaparte's rooted hatred of thinking and writing women and more especially of the domineering Madame de Staël. He fenced a while, endeavouring to divert her attention. She would not be gainsaid, however. Seizing his arm, she led him towards the circle formed round the hero. She elbowed her way through the crowd, and stood facing him, awaiting the effect of the inevitable introduction.

Bonaparte's look betrayed his anger, but Arnault was compelled to act :

“Madame de Staël says that she needs another introduction than that afforded you by her name, and she has therefore asked me to effect this presentation.”

The hordes pressed forward, eager to hear every word of the conversation between two such personalities.

Madame de Staël began by expressing her admiration in florid and lyrical terms, which the hero thought too emphatic.

He replied to them in a cold but polite manner, but his irate look and short, clipped tone sufficed to indicate that he wished to put an end to the dialogue. Such ill-bodings did not awe the valiant woman, who meant to draw Bonaparte into a keen discussion. She conveyed to him that in her opinion he was first among men, and she thought, no doubt, that in reply he would state that no woman was above her. Instead of this, she drew forth a discourteous and somewhat coarse reply, which we need not repeat, as it is known to all.

The rebuff was not a witty one, but it gave Mme de

Staël a very bad fall, and those present laughed heartily at her expense. She sighed, and turning to the poet Arnault said, "Your great man is a very *strange* man." It was a sad illusion which led her to think that he could tolerate a second star, a rival in this world, whether a woman or a muse. She had good reason to remember the reception given by Talleyrand, Minister of the Directoire, to the Signatory of the treaty of Campo-Formio.

Bonaparte was not lulled to sleep by all these functions and receptions, but pursued his efforts to obtain a command from the Republic, in the hopes of winning fresh laurels, which would enable him to master his contemporaries and become a hero in history. He did not fail in either object. He proceeded to study the plans of Hoche, whom he was to succeed in the command of the expedition to Ireland, the object of which was to strike at the very heart of England. As a result of his studies, he dissociated himself from a generous adventure, but very doubtful, owing to the disorganised condition of the French Navy. Moreover, he felt that even though it should prove successful, he would gain no prestige, no crown of glory, as such a crown would rest upon the brow of France. He visited ports and harbours, drew up schemes, wrote reports, and did little else during the very opportune crisis of Prairial.¹

It was at this troubled time, when the Powers were both exhausted and undecided, that he proposed to them the conquest of Egypt. He had conferred at length upon this subject with Talleyrand, who had promised to further his plans by accepting the post of Ambassador at Constantinople or joining him in Cairo, where they could begin negotiations with the Ottoman Porte. It is needless to add that the statesman never left Paris. This expedition to the Levant was not a new idea. The "Directors" had often thought of it, so Talleyrand and Bonaparte found the road quite clear. The latter exposed his views in the most vivid manner, and with such warmth that he created a deep impression upon the members of

¹ Ninth month of Republican Calendar, May 20th to June 18th.

the Directoire. He depicted to them the land of the Pharaohs as a marvellous colony, worth more than all those France had lost, and as a valuable strategic basis whence he could sap the power of England in India. He urged the latter advantage with all his might. His mouthpiece was Magallon, who had resided thirty-two years in Egypt. He was able to overcome the wise hesitation of the Government by means of the notes and information afforded to him by this second Dupleix. To these he added the reports of Poussielgue upon his mission to Malta.

He then resorted to diplomacy, and discovered forthwith what Sorel described as the ingenious expedient employed by all negotiators for the domination of Egypt. He proposed to intervene in the name of the Porte and, in virtue of an alliance, or at least of a great friendship with Turkey, to repair to Egypt as Protectors, and remain there as Masters.¹

Bonaparte resumed his interviews. He seemed absorbed by the one desire to promote the interests of France, forgetting to add that his one object was to satisfy his passion for conquest and his thirst for glory. He obtained a hearing. It was in vain that La Reveillère endeavoured to gainsay the arguments of Bonaparte or to prove to his colleagues the futility of this enterprise, at a time when the dangers of a fateful European War loomed upon the horizon. His pleadings were ignored. Bonaparte persuaded the five "Directors," and to this end Talleyrand helped him with an energy and insistence quite unusual in a man so calm and so prudent.

The "Directors" were only too glad to remove from their sphere of action a man whose ambition was unlimited, and whom they knew they could never restrain. Bonaparte called on the Foreign Minister before leaving Paris and France. He found Talleyrand in bed, but not so ill as to be unable to question him closely upon his plans

¹ History repeats itself. The purchase by Disraeli of the Suez Canal bonds was the thin edge of the wedge which has enabled Egypt to benefit by British rule since 1882. Her policy has, of course, been dictated by such altruistic motives as friendship towards the Porte, goodwill towards the Fellaheen, and the interests of civilisation. (Adapter's note.)

and to listen carefully to all he had to say. The General was most confiding, and spoke with all the heat of youthful enthusiasm. He did not, however, omit to enumerate the obstacles which his enemies were sure to place in his way, and went so far as to refer to matters of an intimate order, such as certain money troubles which harassed him. He had unfolded his whole life in a few minutes. Talleyrand reflected awhile, and then said to him with the utmost simplicity :

“ You will find one hundred thousand francs in my desk. They belong to me, but I wish you to take them, as I know you will repay me when you return.”

Such a proof of confidence was as rare as were the circumstances attending it. Bonaparte embraced him, and thanked him most effusively. Later on, they had occasion to refer to this transaction. Napoleon had refunded the money as soon as he became First Consul, and he remembered the service rendered long after he had become Emperor, though he showed little gratitude for it. In the course of conversation he once said to his Minister :

“ What object could you have had in lending me this money ? I have tried to solve that question a hundred times, but have always failed to do so.”

“ I had no special motive,” replied Talleyrand. “ I felt very ill at the time, and thought I might never see you again. You were young, and created such an impression upon my mind, that without an afterthought I was compelled to help you, knowing what you were worth.”

“ If that be so, your action was merely that of a Simple Simon.”

Which of these two statesmen was sincere ? Probably neither.

Bonaparte did not believe in the possibility of any action being performed without ulterior motives, and Talleyrand was far too able not to have gauged the possibilities of his friend's career. He knew full well that he was lending money to one quite fit to rule the world, and bound to mate his fellow-men, if his life was only spared.

Prince Talleyrand was endowed with a certain amount of good-nature and indulgence towards others, but in political and State matters his protection was not easily obtained, save by those who had already met with success.

The saying of Madame de Vernon, "Every deed of ours can be ascribed to the gratification of our own pleasure or to a spirit of personal interest," is an accurate description of his character, as proved by all his actions. It is quite certain that there was no misdeal in his transaction with Napoleon.

Talleyrand had returned to his Ministerial work. He was engaged in drafting and signing important documents during the short period in which the Directoire covered itself with glory. Then came the fierce renewal of the war after the murder of the French envoys at Rastadt. Willingly or not, he was involved in the overthrow of the Pope, and in the Swiss Revolution. He conducted different negotiations with Portugal, the United States, and the free city of Hamburg. He was unable to prevent the mistakes made during the preliminary stages of the Léoben Conference, although he had foreseen and pointed them out. He had made useless efforts to achieve good results at Lille, when peace with England could soon be effected, as Lord Malmesbury was still approachable. He failed to parry blows dealt by the second coalition which occurred during his second Ministry. All these failures were due to the fact that he had not had a free hand in directing the foreign policy of France. On several occasions, the Directors had modified the spirit and system of his diplomatic conduct towards England and Austria, and his instructions had often been ignored or thwarted by the caprice of his own agents.

In a word, the Directoire reduced to its minimum the responsible power of its Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

Every question that reached his predecessor, Charles Delacroix, was settled and sealed in advance, and the same course was pursued in the case of Talleyrand, who had only to supervise the dispatch of departmental affairs.

He sometimes held back certain matters, thus putting into force the prudent tactics which often enabled him under Napoleon to soften the terms and tone of State documents, once the despot had recovered from his paroxysms of violent temper. Talleyrand signed and initialed, but never decided a matter forthwith. He carefully watched every phase of the contests in which the name of France was engaged. He would undoubtedly have spared his country and Europe many upheavals if in 1798 he had been a member of the executive Government, as he desired to be, instead of playing the part of a Ministerial clerk in its service.¹

As soon as he performed his duties to the best of his ability, Talleyrand exercised his powers of receptive observation in the social circles of the Directoire. The serious acts of the drama were thus divided by interludes of comedy and ballet, as is fit and proper in all well-regulated performances.

It was both his duty and his pleasure to frequent the house of Barras, whose receptions and dinners were most enjoyable.

The Pro-Consul's *chef* was a telling personality of much influence. His menus were published daily, and no one at the Luxembourg contested his influence. Talleyrand often praised his culinary works of art, for the Minister was keenly alive to the pleasures of the table and to many voluptuous attractions of other sorts. Dishes of a fine composition interested his judgment. He com-

¹ On the 25th March, 1798, the following communication was sent to his Court, by Sandoz, the Prussian Minister-plenipotentiary :

"The inclusion of Talleyrand in the Directoire would do untold good. It is rumoured that he may be appointed if he obtains a majority of votes on the Council. He is clever enough to deny these rumours so as to avoid hostile intrigues. My knowledge of this Minister has convinced me that his policy would be extremely favourable to Prussian interests and to the peace of Europe. Whatever contradictions he might suffer at the hands of Rewbell, there would be an end to all shocks and commotions if he were in power. He would cleverly convert his opponent, or obtain a majority against him."

On the 11th April, Sandoz added : "A certain Jarry has published a horrible libel against him, and denounced him as a false Republican, unworthy to become a member of the Directoire, but I repeat what I have already said : 'The convulsions of Europe will cease as soon as Talleyrand becomes a member of the French Government.'"

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mented ingeniously upon them, and his comments were highly prized. The reputation of his own table had become greatly enhanced since money was abundant at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Hospitality was once more dispensed at the Luxembourg, which had become a Palace after having been a prison. It was still bare and stripped of furniture, but the Government made it its head-quarters.

Barras felt the need of luxury, elegance, and distinction. He has been justly termed "the Gentleman of the Revolution, the Alcibiades of the barrack-room, and the Lauzun of the Directoire." He had good manners, and enforced them as best he could in such a set and in such strange times.

His receptions were attended by brilliant wits like Talleyrand, Montrond, Laffitte, Dupaty, and by graceful women possessed of many charms. Most of these came without their husbands whose absence was not regretted. Mesdames de Navailles, ci-devant Duchesse d'Aiguillon, de Carvoisin, de Kreny, de Mailly-Château-Renaud, and the Vicomtesse Joséphine de Beauharnais held sway, while the vivacious Hamelin, the enterprising Thérésa, the romanesque Elise Moranges, the impressionable Hainguerlot, and the mysterious Récamier were not forgotten, and were afforded prominent positions among the honoured guests. In later years Récamier apologised for having been a member of such a social set, and, indeed, almost denied the fact. Her niece, who wrote the *Souvenirs*,¹ stated she never belonged to the society of the Directoire, and was only once the guest of the Vicomte de Barras at a charitable ball which he gave in the spring of 1799. As a matter of fact, she was often his guest, from the very inception of this régime which her belated scruples induced her to hate in after times.

In proof of this we append the following evidence of a witness who had no reason for stating a falsehood.

"As I stood one day at the foot of the stairs leading to the apartments of Citizen Barras, I saw three ladies

¹ Madame Charles Lenormant.

ascending the steps. They were beautiful, and the elegance of their dress, which veiled their charms without hiding them, gave them the appearance of three mythological muses. I learned afterwards that they were Mesdames Tallien, Bonaparte, and Récamier, and that they often graced the drawing-rooms of the 'Director.' To me this was a great surprise, as I had always looked upon him as a most austere Republican."¹ Notwithstanding all her denials, the sweet Juliette Récamier often danced the cotillon in the company of Mme Tallien until the small hours of the morning. The morals and customs of this company were by no means irreproachable.

The drawing-rooms of the Luxembourg were frequented by the same set as the "Thatched Cottage" of the "Queen of Thermidor." People of all sorts, rakes, roués, company promoters, bucket-shop gamblers, concession mongers, wandering "Conventionnels," statesmen, both unattended and unattached, made up a strange collection of consciences already sold or waiting to be purchased. It was useless to be punctilious or too particular in such a set, the drawbacks of which must be endured by all who curried favour with the Directoire. There was no other road to success save that from the "thatched house" to the Luxembourg, and from the Luxembourg to the "thatched house."

The pagan Madonna was worshipped by the same adorers, and by artists, singers and women whose doubtful characters were more than atoned for by the beauty of their features and the flimsy elegance of their garb.

Talleyrand was often at the "Cottage." He laid down his arms before the physical charms of Mme Tallien. He knew she was a well-educated woman who could write and speak well, and as clever in the management of business matters as she was in the art of seduction. She had once improvised a speech which had been loudly applauded. This occurred during Tallien's proconsulate,

¹ *Solvenirs of a Nonagenarian*, p. 146. (Besnard.)

in the Church of the "Recollets" at Bordeaux. Her personal charms were irresistible, and her frivolous ascendancy was as strictly obeyed as if it had been law. Bonaparte soon singed his wings in the flame of her beauty. He was introduced to her shortly before the 13th Vendémiaire, when he was the poorest and least noticed of all her guests. Morose and meditative by nature, he became frivolous and gay in her company. One evening he proceeded to tell her fortune, and held her hand tightly as he proceeded with his frivolous remarks. Had she wished, she could then have harnessed this thin and weakly-looking officer to her chariot and swayed one whose poverty was such that he was compelled to accept charitable alms from Barras.¹

In truth, he only paid his attentions to Joséphine when he had failed to storm the citadel of Mme Tallien.

Joséphine had started her establishment in the Rue Chantreine in 1795. She had signed her lease on the 30th Thermidor in the year III. With no money, but plenty of debts, she trusted to chance, otherwise known as providence, and to the kindness of her friends. In the meantime, she had more dresses than furniture, carriages, but no kitchen utensils, and on State occasions she displayed that gaudy luxury so dear to all half-castes, sacrificing necessities to superfluous and outward show.

There was little life in her mansion of the Rue Chantreine. Barras sometimes took his friends there, but he preferred to invite them to Croissy, her country-house. It was always well plied with victuals and good wines. On ordinary days, her company consisted mainly of noblemen who had been more or less compromised during the prelude of the Revolution, but who had neither lost their gentlemanly appearance nor their gentlemanly manners. Ségur, Montesquiou, Caulaincourt, were witty and charming guests who gracefully clothed the anecdotes of the day, but this calm atmosphere had

¹ His features were so angular that it seemed as though the bones were stripped of all flesh, but his emaciated face was kindled by two sparkling eyes.

to give way to one of enthusiasm and activity as soon as Bonaparte arrived upon the scene. His visits there were frequent, until he made it his lawful and permanent abode, when it became the most crowded and the busiest house in Paris. There were other circles besides those frequented by the "Merveilleuses," and the other *chères amies* of the Directoire. A few of them were composed of the residue of so-called refined society. Among them was the set of the "Constitutional" ladies, with Mme de Staël at their head.

The domestic temple of which Necker's daughter was the oracle, the Constitutional circle of the Hotel de Salm, the *salons* of the sensible Madame de Beaumont, of Madame de Viennay, of Ouvrard and of Talleyrand, were the principal meeting places of Paris society. Its members adopted different customs and different tones when they gambled at Mme de Viennay's.¹

The intellectual group presided over by Germaine Necker, Baronne de Staël, was by far the most powerful. Foreign Ambassadors and noted strangers foregathered there with famous men of letters and politicians. In past years, Barnave, the Lameths, and Duport, had shone in the same firmament. Its chief satellites were Marie-Joseph Chénier, Talleyrand, Thibaudeau, Roederer, Benjamin Constant, Camille Jordan, and Narbonne, whose semi-disgrace had not yet tarnished him, and who was still the favourite of the House. The same group entertained relations with Lanjuinais, Boissy d'Anglas, Cabanis, Garat, Daunou, and Tracy, all moderate republicans, whose ambition it was to wash away the bloody traces of the "Terreur," and to reconstitute society upon a basis of order and of justice.

Conversation was the order of the day in the drawing-room of Mme de Staël. She was surrounded by many whose plans were in no way mature, whose objects and intentions were halting and uncertain, whose ambitions had no

¹ "Everyone is gambling. Such high stakes have never been played for, but we must remember that an excessive love for wine and gambling is a necessary consequence of revolutions" (*Le Temps*).

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precise goal, and whose hesitancy was doomed to pave the way for a Dictatorship. Madame de Staël's friends repaired to her salon anxious to consolidate the Directoire on principle, while despising the Directors. It became a school of Governments, in which she was surrounded by orators and men possessing the gift of writing with eloquence, a gift which was also hers. She thought that those who could speak and write were thereby entitled to govern. That was why she created this academy of budding statesmen, a hot-house in which Ministers were hatched.

While these noble minds were engrossed by theatrical discussions and fevered by nothing but their own ideas, important and unforeseen events were being slowly hatched. Of all men, Talleyrand was the best informed concerning them. He had received due warning, so that he might play his part. For some time past he had ceased to frequent the Constitutional Club ; he remained in the country, between four walls, patiently awaiting opportune time for returning to power. He had abandoned simultaneously Paris and his official residence. We will now relate how he ceased to be a Minister.

His diplomatic relations with Portugal and the Hanseatic City of Hamburg had earned for him suspicions, if not official reproaches, on account of certain venal dealings of which he was accused. Fresh imputations added weight to those already laid at his door, and it was rumoured that his agents had indulged in hidden dealings with the envoys of the United States. He had not succeeded in completely vindicating his character upon those counts. Difficulties had arisen some years previously between the Government of Paris and the newly fledged American Republic. Washington was not fired in 1792 with the enthusiasm and love with which he was inspired when he took leave of La Fayette, and said to him as he pressed him to his heart : " Your departure seems to rob me of the image of that beautiful France who has loved us so generously, and whom I have loved so well by loving you." The Revolutionary excesses had tried him sorely, and his Federal advisers, who were

all in sympathy with England, strengthened his decision to maintain the neutrality of the United States in all the strifes that were dismantling both France and Europe.

An envoy of the Revolutionary Government, citizen Genêt, had been sent to invoke the moral and physical help of America whose freedom had been secured by the help of France. He was afforded the coldest reception at Washington, while he was the recipient of the most popular greetings on his way from Charlestown to Philadelphia. Washington thereupon published a proclamation of neutrality on the 22nd of April, 1793, with the object of bridling the expressions of sympathy towards France, which threatened to become both excessive and dangerous.

Several shocks and collisions had occurred in the political world across the Atlantic under the Presidency of John Adams, and they had caused violent acts of hostility between the contending parties.

The French Government could not forgive the Federalists for having signed the Jay treaty. Its stipulations relating to the commerce of the United States and England were denounced as a formal violation of the agreements signed in 1778 between France and America. Strict orders were issued against the landing of all American trading vessels, many of which were seized.

A maritime war seemed inevitable between the two countries. John Adams had the good sense, however, not to resort to extreme measures so long as a peaceful settlement was at all possible. The United States sent delegates to Paris with the object of appeasing the Directoire, and of apologising for certain breaches of neutrality. The conversation began in the usual polite form, but soon the officious agents of Talleyrand (Bellamy, Saint-Foix, Montrond, and André d'Arbelles) spared no pains to make the Americans understand that a preliminary bestowal of "Douceurs," in the shape of a little ready money, would greatly facilitate the solution of the problem. This seemed an accepted practice amongst

secret diplomats of the day. It was excusable to a certain extent, owing to the depletion of the Directoire Treasury.

An important transaction was seldom concluded without the gift of a little "Douceur," in the shape of coin, given from hand to hand to the Ministers, or to the members of the Directoire themselves. There had always been listeners at the keyhole; moreover, the good folk of America had not yet been contaminated by European corruption, and this novel *modus operandi* caused them to express their opinions of it in rather loud tones, which were re-echoed by the Press of the United States.

Talleyrand bore the brunt of these denunciations. He tried to conjure the storm by disowning those who had caused it, that is to say, his own agents. He wrote the following letter to M. Géry, one of the foreign plenipotentiaries.

"Sir,—I have the honour to enclose a London Paper of the 5th of May, containing a very strange statement. I am surprised to learn that certain intriguers have taken advantage of the seclusion observed by the Envoys of the United States, in order to make proposals to them, with the plain object of deceiving them.

"Will you be good enough to tell me the names indicated or hinted at by the initials W. X. Y. Z., and that of the woman who was stated to have conversed with Mr. Pinkerey about American interests. If you object to giving me this information in writing, kindly convey it to the bearer by word of mouth. I trust you will inform the Government of these underhand dealings, which you no doubt desire to bring into the fullest light.

"I congratulate you upon not having been duped by them.

"(Signed) TALLEYRAND."

Unfortunately, the Ministerial denial elicited prompt replies. The officious Bellamy did not remain silent,

but asserted that he had merely obeyed the instructions of his Minister. This gave rise to a grievous scandal. The "Société du Manège," commonly known as the "Société des Patriotes," was the loudest of all in denouncing the guilty ones.

Talleyrand's position had been insecure for some time. He wrote to Sandoz, the Prussian Minister: "I can only maintain my position by a miracle of prudence and of tactful behaviour." With the exception of Barras who posed as his protector, the other Directors hardly ever spoke to him. The strain became insupportable. He resigned office on the 2nd Thermidor, year VII, and appointed his own successor, the wise Reinhardt, a modest, self-effacing man, who was content to understudy the part during a short period of four months.

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Talleyrand was anxious to resume a position both lucrative and influential, but on this occasion he did not try to regain possession of it through the help of Mme de Staël, whose friends indulged in far too much eloquence for his taste. Actual contingencies appealed much more than oratorical efforts to positive men like Talleyrand and Fouché. They now sought the society of the Bonapartes, Joseph and Lucien forsooth, whose polite advances had first been proffered in the *salons* of Joséphine.

Talleyrand was not accused of ingratitude, for he did not break off abruptly with Mme de Staël. He simply withdrew little by little, gradually forsaking her *salon*, which became the head-quarters of the Opposition under the Consulate. She had accurately gauged the future career of Bonaparte.

The splendid sentiments expressed by the young Conqueror of Italy had created no impression upon her mind, but she spared no effort to attract him towards her. She nursed the great hope of governing one day with him and through him. Talleyrand had not been tricked by the patriotic assertions of Bonaparte. He

would have liked to humanise the Revolution, and to evoke true liberty and justice from the Constitution of the year III, conceived in trouble as it was. Such was his wish, but he was powerless to enforce it. In the meantime, Bonaparte was knocking at the door like one who would not wait.

Important news had just come to hand. Bonaparte, apprised of recent events, had suddenly arrived at Fréjus. Forsaking his troops, his post, Egypt, and his duty, he had sailed in the teeth of a heavy gale and evaded the vigilance of the British General (unless his vigilance had been wilfully relaxed).

Talleyrand favoured Bonaparte's plans, and secretly wrote advising him to exercise the greatest prudence at the onset. "Do not hurry; travel by short stages and compel them to yearn for you. The numberless troubles that actually beset us will send a strong contingent of anxieties and fervent hopes to greet your coming, and it is with this escort that you will return to Paris."

His good advice was followed. Talleyrand was aware of every step that was taken, for it was on his treacherous advice that the Government had recalled Bonaparte who, they hoped, would overcome all difficulties. He did not pretend to any knowledge of this scheme. His innocent expression would have deceived all those who had no reason to suspect that his most placid and unconcerned appearance was but a borrowed mask under which he hatched deeply concerted plans. Rivarol had said of him: "This accursed cripple will lead us a pretty dance, and make us travel much farther than we suspect": Carnot, the ex-Director, added, "The artful schemer would sell us all if it were to his advantage." He had carefully studied the moral side of his conduct, which he was quite prepared to vindicate, as he did later on. He did not look upon his action as a base treachery or mean disloyalty, but as the outcome of a compulsory and fatal revolution. Had he been swayed by his feelings, he would willingly have intervened between Bonaparte and the Directoire.

In remembrance of the eminent services rendered to him by Barras, he would have undertaken to negotiate between the two Powers, one of which was sinking fast into the night, while the other was about to shine forth in its brilliant dawn. This opportunity was missed because he was not forewarned at the psychological moment. He was not addicted to saving people in spite of themselves. He proved this in the case of Louis XVI, and more forcibly still in that of Napoleon. He therefore went over bag and baggage to the party of strength, wealth, and influence.

It is true that some days previously he had asserted his unswerving devotion to the Directoire and its Directors at a sitting of the Academy of Moral Science, but is it not also true that in politics, assertions and denials, oaths and perjury are but the problematic chances of the game?

Nothing had been decided when, on the 16th of October, 1799, Bonaparte fell from the skies among the intriguers. He did not make up his mind to act on the spur of the moment, being loathe to resort to violence, and he thought it best to ask the Directors to appoint him to their Board, just as Talleyrand had done previously. They were afraid to do so. Both Gohier and Moulins pleaded his youth as an excuse for keeping him in check and refusing his requests. Paul Barras was too busy with his mistresses and his protégés to interfere, and he argued that by giving him a fresh command abroad it would be quite easy to get rid of this somewhat obstructive young hero. Then it was that the "Man of Destiny" decided to seize by strength that which they would not yield to him with good grace. Fortunately for him one of the Directors, the vacillating Siéyès, was prepared to betray his colleagues and seek a strong arm, by the help of which he could impose his latest scheme for a new Constitution. Bonaparte joined hands with him, fully decided to get rid of him and his Constitution whenever he chose. Their first meeting as the guests of Barras, a meeting that cost Barras a great

deal more than the price of the dinner, was anything but a success. Neither of them wished to make the first advances. Talleyrand observed them both very closely.

With infinite tact he insinuated himself between the most dictatorial of Generals and the most starched and formal of all the Directors. With a deft hand, he removed the stumbling-stone, tightened the bonds of mutual interests, and started the decisive conversation in the course of which the *coup d'état* was conceived.

The Directoire had only existed five years, and yet its downfall was ascribed to senile decay.

"Where are we drifting?" said a woman of rank to Talleyrand, who replied:

"To Royalty, Madame, with the help of the foreigners."¹

The administrative chaos was not entirely caused by the Directoire, but it could not be prolonged indefinitely. It was necessary to find a way out of it without delay. Those who were driving the chariot of State were far from reassured in these times of acute crisis and general depression, for the chariot was making no headway. The condition of affairs was the more critical as one of the five coachmen was doing his best to sap the authority of his own Government, because he knew that it was tottering.

The advice of Barras was to sell the Republican cockade to the emissaries of Louis XVIII for the sum of twelve millions. The masters of the situation were so disunited that they had not dared to deal sternly with Napoleon while there was yet time. Dubois-Crancé, the War Minister, had insisted upon their doing so. This strong Jacobin returned in haste from Fréjus, declaring that the rebel General should be forthwith arrested and shot as a deserter for having abandoned his command.

The hour of the execution was, however, settled at

¹ Talleyrand always contended that the Wars of the Revolution, with all their consequences, were caused by the refusal of Europe to acknowledge the principle of national supremacy in France, though it had done so in the case of England.

four o'clock that same day, but it was postponed at the request of La Réveillère-Lépeaux, whose action was dictated by fear, scruples, or hesitation. Several of his colleagues had already signed the decree, but he refused to do so. They yielded to him. Napoleon was saved, but France was not.

The threatened Directors were taking few or no precautions to secure their own safety, although they were in imminent peril. Barras was warned of this, and he answered, "The Directoire has foreseen everything, and is jealously guarding the safety of the Republic." Having delivered himself of this beautiful sentence, he was satisfied to return to his amusements. His eventual downfall was mainly due to the indolence and lack of prudence displayed by him, whose whole thoughts were devoted to worldly pursuits and to the worship of woman.

The following sentence had been written by every historian of the period :

"It is inevitable that every Republic should become the prey of a soldier."¹

Hoche would have impeded the progress of Bonaparte, but he died too soon. Moreau, whom the Directoire looked upon as a strong supporter, temporised from day to day, and could not make up his mind to act. Masséna was leading his troops beyond the frontier, Bernadotte awaited a combination which was not effected until 1814.

The most daring of all the Generals of the Republic had still to be reckoned with. He had long since made up his mind to try and tempt fortune at any cost.

On the 12th May, 1796, after the Battle of Lodi, he conceived the possibility of playing some trick on the Directoire. Circumstances had worked so well in his favour that notwithstanding his flight from Egypt, he

¹ As far back as 1770, Rivarol had predicted the inevitable end of these upheavals of men and things:

"Either the King shall have an Army, or the Army shall have a King. Revolutions always pave the way to the domination of the sword. Such was the case with Sylla, Cæsar, Cromwell, and scores of others."

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had become the man of the situation, the indispensable man, sought by all parties, because each of them hoped to rise and triumph with him. A Jacobin leader was surprised to meet the Bourbon agents in his ante-room. Siéyès had twice called upon Bonaparte, devoured by ambition and pride, but full of prudence and clever manœuvring. Between the contending parties, he had foreseen the dictatorship and the means of using it to his own advantage.¹

Talleyrand did not need the example of Siéyès, for, as the good opportunist that he was, he too shaped his conduct upon circumstances, but with much more ability than was displayed by Siéyès. His theory was that everything obtained from a Government, though it might not be the Government of one's choice, was so much gained, so much assured, until such time as one could obtain other advantages from a better Government. He added, that one should even derive benefit by changing from one party to another.

An alliance was soon effected between himself and Bonaparte. This fact became known at a reception which he gave, and from which Barras absented himself. On another occasion, Talleyrand went as far as the porch of the *Comédie française* to greet the General who clasped him affectionately as he whispered some important secret in his ear. Everything tended to favour their ambitions, and no one dared bar their way. On the 18th Brumaire, there was a false alert at Talleyrand's house in the Rue Taitbout, where he occupied a house situated in a courtyard. The first storey communicated with the apartments looking on to the street.

It was about one in the morning, and the leaders of the *coup d'état* were engaged in animated conversation in the drawing-room, which was lit by candle light. Suddenly a great noise was heard in the street. It was

¹ Burke, the famous Irish orator, gave the following description of the Abbé Siéyès :

“The Abbé Siéyès has drawers full of Constitutions, ticketed, ready, classed, and annotated. They can be applied to all times, all circumstances, with the efficacy of a patent medicine.”

caused by several carriages and the clattering of a cavalry escort. The noise stopped and the carriages were drawn up at the door of the house. Napoleon grew pale, and those around him were even more frightened than the brave warrior. The host hurriedly extinguished all the lights and proceeded to one of the front rooms to observe what was going on in the street. Their fears were soon dispelled, for the whole fracas was caused by a police escort which had accompanied the owner of a gambling-house to his home, lest he might be robbed of the large sums he carried. The candles were lit once more, and the incident was a source of great merriment among those present. Their feelings would have been somewhat different if what they had good reason to fear had really come to pass.

Good-bye, then, to the 18th Brumaire, and to all its epoch-making consequences. Matters were proceeding apace, useful help was forthcoming. Fouché and many other Jacobins, who loved public freedom as sincerely as he did, were among the first arrivals at the house of Lemercier, President of the Council of Ancients. This was the rendezvous of the conspirators. On the 19th, Talleyrand hurried to Saint-Cloud, where the Consular cause had many adherents. He was accompanied by Montrond, who acted as his aide-de-camp. This faithful Achates was rapidly becoming his shadow. He followed him with a persistent intent that eventually became a lifelong habit. Montrond was a daring and calculating man, endowed with a pretty wit. From the first day he realised that much useful glory would accrue to him if he became the faithful reflector of the pre-eminent qualities, the public defects and the fluctuations of Talleyrand's career in the political world.

Future events meted out that glory to one who would have liked to play a part instead of merely being the witness of those enacted by others.

When the crisis had reached its acute stage, this witness noticed that Bonaparte turned livid on learning that he had been declared an outlaw. Remembering

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a phrase of Talleyrand, Montrond exclaimed, "General, this is unseemly on your part."

It was an appropriate saying, but one which Talleyrand took good care never to repeat. Montrond was a more daring and a less scrupulous man.

The inevitable encounter occurred between the Conquered Directoire and the Conqueror of Italy, between the Councils of the Five Hundred and the Grenadiers of the Legislative Corps. The former spoke and shouted in defence of the Constitution, while the latter invoked the right of force, carried away by the imperious rhythm of the charge and by the voice of their chiefs, although they had not responded at first to the appeals of Bonaparte who cried: "Follow me, follow me, I am the God of the day; follow me, and slaughter all who resist you!"

During this conflict between might and right, Talleyrand was satisfied to watch events, and only once intervened when, noticing a lull, he sent the following message to Bonaparte.

"Tempt fortune and seize the bull by the horns. Bring matters to an issue at any cost."

His advice was followed, and as a result the 18th Brumaire was now an accepted fact. The nation clamoured for a firm and peaceful Government. Bonaparte organized it and gave it to the country, enjoying its benefits till such time as its organizer chose to claim and obtain a heavy prize for it. Joy and hope sprang to every breast. The Generals proclaimed their whole-hearted devotion, and swore it was unbounded. The Ministers of the morrow were busy creating around the First Consul an atmosphere of admiration bordering upon worship.

Talleyrand analysed the new state of affairs as one interested no doubt in its success, but completely devoid of enthusiasm. He did not know how long this triumph could last without indulging in grave excesses, and reserved his judgment upon its real merits. His calm demeanour was interpreted as indifference. It was a source of grave anxiety to Madame de Rémusat at the

very time when the Consulate had attained supreme authority.

“ How is it,” she said to him, “ that you are satisfied to live without experiencing the slightest emotion, when contemplating that which you not only behold but which is actually your creation ? ”

“ Oh, Madame, how truly womanly and how delightfully young you are ! ” was his reply.

He quietly proceeded to attenuate the early fervour of his feelings towards Bonaparte by ridiculing them himself during the most brilliant phase of the General's career. This, because he could see much farther than the ordinary followers, who fell in ecstasy at the feet of their future tyrant !

CHAPTER VI

OFFICIAL AND PRIVATE LIFE UNDER THE CONSULATE

Inception of the new political reorganization—Talleyrand recalled to the Foreign Office—The condition of Europe when Bonaparte left for Saint-Bernard—During the master's absence—Fears concerning "The Secret Crisis," or, in other words, "The defeat or death of the First Consul"—Plots and intrigues—How the sky suddenly cleared after the victory of Marengo—Talleyrand's negotiations with Austria and England—The signature of the Treaty of Amiens—The result of long and arduous labours—The cool and simple way in which the Minister informed the Chief of the State of the success achieved—France becomes reconciled with Europe and the Church—General and private interests fostered by Talleyrand in the important matter of the Concordat—His long correspondence with the Roman Chancery with a view to obtaining the Brief of Secularisation—Bitter controversies upon the marriage of Bishops—Objections raised by Rome—The Press and diplomatic means employed in order to obviate this difficulty—Premature rumours concerning the marriage of Talleyrand—The consecutive circumstances which brought about this conjugal event—The antecedents of Madame Grand before she became Duchesse de Talleyrand-Périgord, and Princesse de Bénévent—After the marriage—Comments passed upon it in the *salons* of the Foreign Office—Truth and fiction concerning the ingenuous nature of Mme de Talleyrand—The different phases of this union until its decline—Talleyrand returns to public life.

THE sudden change had been effected at a moderate cost. A few arrests, the suppression of some newspapers, crowds trampled upon by the cavalry in the suburbs, such was the price paid. France did not complain of being delivered so cheaply of a Government without strength or prestige. The illegality of the act was absolved owing to the large compensations foreseen. Kindled by the wish to see order restored, the people forgot that liberty which had been so dearly bought that they had ceased to love it. The Consulate was about to dispense all these blessings until such day as the will of one man would convert freedom into compulsion, and

compulsion into tyranny. For the nonce, every heart was filled with hope unlimited.

The Consuls had assumed power. They had discarded Siéyès from their triumvirate by closing his mouth with a title, a fortune, and a domain. Their first act was to introduce themselves to the nation with due official solemnity. They did so in the metaphorical language so dear to the French.

The inevitable proclamation was a sacred duty to be performed by the newly chosen heads of the Republic. They proceeded to lull their fellow-citizens with those noble words—pacification, justice, and humanity—the use of which was ever able to seduce and deceive a Frenchman.

Every reign and every Presidency has been inaugurated by similar statements.

Bonaparte sent for Roederer, to whom he dictated in high-sounding words the most deceptive proclamation ever addressed by a ruler to his future subjects.

These memorable considerations shone forth as though written on the frontispiece of a sacred Temple, dedicated to the most generous sentiments of humanity:

“Moderation is the corner-stone of all morals and the first virtue of man.”

“Without moderation, man is but a savage beast.”

“Without moderation, factions can exist, but not Governments.”

Yes, it was Napoleon Bonaparte who in these terms sang the praises of moderation, till such time as he devoted all his strength and all his genius to the upheaval and disintegration of the world.

Having delivered himself of these exalted feelings, he proceeded to form a Cabinet, and appointed Talleyrand to the Foreign Office, not for reasons of gratitude, nor of profound esteem, but for those which he thus explained to Cambacérès: ¹

“He is eminently fitted for these negotiations, by his knowledge of the world and of the Courts of Europe,

¹ Unpublished memoirs of Cambacérès.

by his astuteness, not to call it by another name, by his impassive expressions, which nothing can alter, and, last but not least, by the great name he bears. I know it was his own conduct that drove him into the arms of the Revolution, and his own interests will guarantee us in our dealings with this Jacobin and traitor to his cloth in the 'Assemblée Constituante.' ”

Talleyrand did not take immediate possession of the post, of which he had been deprived towards the end of the Directoire through the influence of the “Société du Manège,” who had replaced him by the benevolent Reinhardt of Wurtemberg. Public opinion had not yet become reconciled to Talleyrand since the American incident and its disastrous notoriety. Napoleon stated in his memorial that it was deemed advisable to allow some little time to elapse before bringing his personal exalted position into the full light. The time deemed necessary was of short duration, for it lasted twelve days only.

In the meantime, Talleyrand was fully occupied. He spent his whole time with Roederer and Boulay in the Petit-Luxembourg, where he conferred with Bonaparte upon the necessary measures for a political organization. He went from one pavilion to another, exchanging views with the Consuls, and informing each of them in turn of the wishes or objections set forth by their colleagues. He also discussed the Siéyès “*Nec plus ultra*” system of Government with its author, that theoretical politician with whom Bonaparte found it difficult to come to any practical understanding. He felt instinctively that Siéyès would have liked to bridle his appetite for absolute power, while he, the Conqueror, considered himself entitled to exercise all the prerogatives of autocracy.

The antagonism between these two men was well known to Talleyrand who on the eve of the *coup d'état* had reconciled these two difficult natures, the one obstinately systematic, the other thirsting for unquestioned supremacy. Their former differences had

become somewhat embittered by the division of spoils. Talleyrand still persisted in playing the part of peace-maker. He was present at an interview between them, which was anything but friendly. Siéyès fell back upon a haughty and somewhat contemptuous line of argument. Bonaparte was both threatening and aggressive.

“Do you wish to be King?” was the Roman interpolation of Siéyès.

The discussion reached a hostile tone, which greatly tried the natural self-restraint of Talleyrand. He had agreed with Roederer to find a common ground for the two antagonists. By dint of specious reasoning, they succeeded in wearing down Siéyès and in wrenching from him a series of concessions which left him as the First Consul wished him to be, unarmed, tricked, and deceived. He was offered compensations, such as the Presidency of the Senate. It was explained to him that though deprived of the first and second place upon the executive Council, he would be the head of the legislative body, and could treat with it in a free and dignified manner as from power to power. The freedom which was to permit of this was a short-lived one indeed.

On the 22nd of November, 1799, Talleyrand took possession of the Foreign Office, where he remained until the 8th of August, 1807.

He had no sooner done so than he conceived an ingenious means of increasing his personal influence with Bonaparte by giving greater scope to the office of First Consul. The three principal magistrates of the Republic were wont to meet daily and to hear the reports of all their Ministers concerning their departments. He privately conveyed his views to Bonaparte upon the exceptional case of the Foreign Office, whose relations with Foreign Powers could not, he said, be disclosed to a Committee. Wisdom and prudence required that to the real head of the Government alone should be imparted State secrets concerning the affairs of other nations. For these reasons he submitted that the administration

of Foreign Affairs should be undertaken by the First Consul himself.¹

This advice flattered Bonaparte, who would certainly have conceived the same idea had it not been suggested to him. He had already laid embargo upon all truly executive powers relating to the Army and the Navy, and to all matters connected with War. He now bluntly declared that the administration of Foreign Affairs was the natural corollary of the powers he already possessed, and that henceforth he meant to undertake it.

The conduct of legislative business was in itself sufficient to tax the strength of Cambacérès, while Lebrun, the wise and prudent Lebrun, found that the management of financial affairs was as much as he could control. None of them raised the slightest objection, and as matters are always easily managed in a newly constituted Government, it was unanimously agreed that the Minister for Foreign Affairs should report directly to the First Consul upon all diplomatic questions.

The great changes which had occurred in France had not improved her strained relations with England, Austria, and Russia, but two essential points in the general condition of European relations had deeply impressed themselves upon the mind of Talleyrand. He felt on the one hand, that France, exhausted by seven years of strife, sorely needed peace and ardently wished for it. On the other hand, he was convinced, at the end of 1799, that this peace could be secured at little cost, provided an effort to do so was undertaken with skill and in a spirit of conciliation.

The Czar was only too anxious to sheathe his sword. The defeat of his troops by Masséna had not irritated him as much as the behaviour of Austria, his ally, by whom he considered that he had been wilfully deceived. His

¹ By strengthening the hands of one whom he knew to be already invested with that degree of power exercised by the heads of moderate and constitutional monarchies, Talleyrand knew that he was paving the way for him to the three degrees of such a Sovereignty, to wit, election for a determined period, appointment for life, and thirdly the right of succession to his heirs.

peaceful sentiments were cleverly fostered by the First Consul, who not only sent back the Russian prisoners of war without a ransom, but clothed in new uniforms, and presented Paul I with the sword of La Valette, Grand Master of the Order of Malta, knowing as he did the extraordinary desire of the Russian Emperor to become a member of the said Order. On the 8th October, 1801, Talleyrand had the satisfaction of signing a treaty with the Comte de Markof, the Czar's ambassador. These two negotiators met again after the accession of Alexander I. Talleyrand observed the same politeness and the same diplomatic reserve, while Markof had assumed under his new master an arrogant air which was almost hostile. They met with a view to discussing the important question of secularisation in Germany.

Though England's enmity towards France still endured, she was willing to disarm, provided the evacuation of Egypt was effected.

It was Talleyrand who had predicated the conquest of Egypt at a time when the Directoire was more than hampered by numerous difficulties. He now, however, deemed it wise not to remain there, as he thought that universal peace would afford ample compensation for the loss of a splendid colony. Bonaparte was not so eager to extend the olive branch to the world at large. It was his military prestige that had gained for him his exalted position, and he felt that military prestige alone could render it secure. He was preparing to avenge his defeats in Egypt, and was not devoured by the desire to reconcile the peaceful results of his accession to power with the reproach hurled at the Directoire of having deserved its downfall, because it had bullied nations and disturbed the peace of Europe.

Fired only by the wish to disguise his true intentions and to decrease the number of his enemies, he had written to the King and to the Emperor of Germany expressing to them his wish for a speedy reconciliation between their countries and his.

He was obsessed by the one idea which haunted his

conquering imagination. He hoped to reopen the Eastern question, to regain possession of Egypt and to plant in its soil deep roots which would grow and extend their ramifications as far as possible upon Oriental soil. This was the one object of his great despotic dream and it became the rule of thumb in all his relations with Russia and England.

The British Government rejected his advances. He had offered to hand back her Italian Provinces to Austria, who replied by sending her armies into the field under the commandship of Melas. The First Consul was compelled to change his plans abruptly and to extend his hand to Russia. He succeeded in securing the friendship, almost the alliance of the Czar who until then had been the main supporter of the coalition. Bonaparte's task was now reduced to fighting Austria upon those Italian plains to which he promptly returned.

He did not leave France in a happy frame of mind, but often looked back, feeling that his newly acquired power was now at the mercy of a defeat, a rising, or a conspiracy. He had secured many friends, no doubt, by appointing men of all shades of opinion to the numerous vacancies in prefectures, legal circles, the Corps Législatif, the State Council, and the Senate. They now nurtured one common wish, which was to safeguard the positions conferred upon them.

On the other hand, the Royalists were beginning to make themselves both felt and heard. They were rivals who could not be ignored, because they were the masters of Western France and hoped to rally the South. Moreover, they were supported by the coalised armies and helped by British subsidies.

Bonaparte had stolen a march upon them, and for this they did not forgive him. They were anxious to start and extend the conspiracies they had been compelled to postpone by the rigorous measures which the late Government had enforced. During the early days of the Consulate they were content to observe the doings of a leader who had not yet displayed the full measure

of his powers and of his ambition. Being anxious to know more about him and to decide whether they could look upon him as the providential "Monk," the devoutly wished-for Restorer, they sent two secret negotiators to him, whose names were Fortuné d'Andigné and Hyde de Neuville, whose mission it was to question him in two words :

A "Royalty or a Republic ? "

Talleyrand had been notified of their arrival, and he consented to act as their intermediary at this strange meeting.

In this he had followed the wish of Baron de Bourgoing, one of his attachés and a friend of Hyde de Neuville.¹ He had given rise to great hopes in the Royalist camp. With the conviction that he could win over these emissaries and their forces, Bonaparte agreed with Talleyrand to afford them all the security and guarantees possible for the safeguard of their persons.

Talleyrand had not gone so far as to prophesy success to a man of Bonaparte's mettle, who was in no way disposed to prepare a couch for any other King than himself. The delegates from Vendée did not need to question him at length before fully realising the true state of affairs. The conversation was short and to the point, and the terms used by Bonaparte left no room for uncertainty.

¹ On the 23rd Frimaire of the year VIII, Hyde de Neuville received the following letter from Bourgoing who, like himself, came from the Province of Nevers :

"My dear fellow-countryman, I am happy to inform you that our business has proceeded apace. Last night our intermediary with B. [Bonaparte] told me to call upon the latter between nine and ten this morning. I have just done so, and the result of our interview was as negative as I could have wished. I told him everything, revealed everything concerning you and them. We did not agree upon all points, but they are disposed to listen to us and I am therefore instructed to bring you to see T. [Talleyrand] at four o'clock to-day. A carriage will fetch you at 3.45, and I shall be in it unless I join Talleyrand before you, but in that case I shall come down from my office at four sharp, and await you in the drawing-room. If, before we meet, you have the opportunity of doing so, tell our friends, from T. and from B., that they will enjoy all the safety which loyalty and old French honour will guarantee to them. Bonaparte glories in the fact that you, I and they will be as safe in his presence as in the bosom of the family" (National Archives, F. 7, 6247).

The delegates returned with the impression that they had shot very wide of the mark and completely missed their aim.¹

They soon thought the time was ripe for taking up arms in behalf of their King. Bonaparte was on his way to Geneva, engrossed by the study of the daring diversion towards the Alps, which he was about to execute at the head of his troops. The Government machine had not suspended its work and all public documents bore the following words, "*Signed, Cambacérès, in the absence of the First Consul.*" Before his departure, Bonaparte had issued drastic instructions for dealing with whomsoever endeavoured to provoke trouble. "Strike and strike mercilessly ; it is the will of France." His absence and that of his army gave rise, however, to considerable anxiety, while it also fed the hopes of his antagonists.

The police and Fouché its chief seemed to have intentionally relaxed their usual efforts. The Royalists were active at home and abroad. The pulse of Vendée was beating in the very heart of Paris, and its intrigues had started once more in the capital, as they had done under the Directoire. The Vendée conspirators were backed up by several other factions from the West of France, who were also working in the capital. These were not the only conspiracies on foot. The Republicans, or rather the Republican officials and authorities, were perplexed concerning the future of the Republic.

What would become of them, if Bonaparte fell upon the field of battle ?

"If such was to be the result of the chances of war to which he was daily exposed, it meant that they would be taken unawares at a most critical moment. Many plans were nurtured by resourceful brains, both in the Senate and elsewhere, for dealing with this eventuality and for choosing a successor to Bonaparte. The name of Carnot was mentioned. Fouché held Bernadotte in reserve,

¹ See the *Memoirs of Hyde de Neuville* concerning this Luxembourg interview between the First Consul and the Princes' envoys, whom Talleyrand had met with his carriage at the corner of the Place Vendôme.

hoping to govern with him when he had placed him in power. In the midst of all these intrigues and all this canvassing he did not remain idle, for he too had foreseen the possible changes that would be wrought by the death of Bonaparte. He was not one likely to be overtaken by sudden events. He often said: “ ‘ *What is* ’ counts for little every time you reflect that ‘ *What is* ’ represents the cause of ‘ *What shall be!* ’ ”¹

This was the maxim by which he explained all his past, present and future variations. He cleverly calculated his chances without showing his hand, and without exposing himself to public comment. He kept in touch with everyone, but betrayed his mind to none. He made no rash offers or promises, for such would have jeopardised his position if Bonaparte returned unexpectedly. He entertained relations abroad which would prove useful to him in the future, and so cleverly did he manage his affairs that whatever happened he must be the man of the situation under any other régime. He frequented the leaders and the Senators of the Opposition, resumed his relations with Siéyès, who was still sulking over his recent disappointment, and he attended the monthly dinner of the “ Brumairiens.” He was more than affable towards the Orleanist factions, protected the Refugees, entertained social relations with the representatives of Louis XVIII, to whom he whispered words of hope, and allowed Madame Grand, his mistress and future wife, to boast that she was a Royalist.²

The Anglo-Royalist agents were busy once more, and the effervescence of the West and South had become alarming. Conspiracy was rife. Ex-Terrorists, the scum of the earth, anarchists and Babouvists³ for whom no situations had been found, were all organized, and held threatening meetings.

¹ *The Accession of Bonaparte*, by Albert Vandal, vol. ii., and *The History of the Emigration*, vol. ii., by Ernest Daudet.

² These were the premeditated breaches of faith and loyalty which proved so useful to him throughout his long career.

³ *Babouf*, the founder of “ *Babouism*,” was the apostle who preached the doctrine of common wealth, or the community of goods. He was executed in 1797 for engaging in a conspiracy against the Directoire.

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Every conspirator was on tenterhooks expecting the news of Bonaparte's death, or at least of his defeat, which they hoped would cause the downfall of the Consular Republic.

The thunder-clap of Marengo dissipated all these unwholesome vapours.

Talleyrand congratulated himself upon not having transgressed the limits of wide expectancy. He had sailed very close to the wind, and one remembers the somewhat sorry figure he cut in the Dupérou incident. Dupérou, the ex-Director of the Royalist counter-police, brought grave and positive accusations against Talleyrand, to the great joy of Fouché, his rival.¹

The whole affair was stifled in its cradle, and never came to light. The victories of the First Consul absorbed the public attention, and as soon as they were known, there was an immediate cessation of all hostile machinations. The soul of the country vibrated with enthusiasm and was filled with admiration for the Conqueror and with hopes of peace.

The French remained masters of the battlefield. The time was ripe for the intervention of diplomacy, and Talleyrand was ready to negotiate. Francis II had been compelled to sign the truce of Steyer by the battles of Marengo and of Hohenlinden, the more as both Brune and Macdonald were approaching, having joined forces in the Trontin Alps.

Six months later, Joseph Bonaparte and Talleyrand met the plenipotentiary of the German Emperor at Lunéville. A treaty was signed on the 9th of January, 1801, the conditions of which were so onerous for Austria that it seemed unlikely she would adhere to it for long.

The gods of fortune, war and peace showered their favours upon the First Consul. A convention had just been signed between Joseph Bonaparte and the envoys

¹ "Report upon the treachery of an important official of the Foreign Office" (National Archives, vol. F., 76, 247).

of Northern America, and the harmonious relations between the two Republics were resumed once more after a period of discord that had lasted since 1794.

The civil war in the Western Provinces of France was coming to an end. The Czar Paul had strictly adhered to the Franco-Russian Alliance, and had, moreover, promised France his active co-operation against Great Britain who, according to him, was violating all the rights of nations. Bonaparte had not abandoned his old plans and was quite prepared to fight out the issue with England, the reward of which would be the possession of Egypt and the East.

While engaged in fighting Austria in the month of May, 1800, he wrote to Talleyrand, his Minister: "It is very important to have someone in Russia at the present moment. The Ottoman Empire is crumbling to pieces, and if the Czar Paul casts his gaze upon it, we shall have interests in common with him."

Two days later he returned to the same subject.

"Every consideration must be shown to the Czar. Our representative at Hamburg should make generous overtures to him. Please decide at once upon a course of action."

France's hands were free once more. A powerful friend had come to her assistance. The victory of Admiral Linois at Algéciras, the successes of Latouche-Tréville and Nelson himself, and the contemplation of the admirable activity displayed upon the French coasts were strong incentives to courage. For the first time since the wars of the great Revolution, England seemed isolated from the rest of Europe. It was high time to strike and to settle the question, hand to hand, nation to nation.

Napoleon was feverishly engaged in preparing to invade Britain. He was convinced that the day was near at hand when he could give effect to the words he spoke to Hawkesbury, the British diplomat:—"The greatness of Rome would reveal itself against that of Carthage."

He was compelled, however, to change his plans, owing to the occupation of Egypt by the British, the murder

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of Paul I, and the victory of Nelson in the Baltic. The whole situation had altered, to the intense delight of Talleyrand, who had looked askance upon the coming war, which would have played fresh havoc on land and sea. He began to negotiate with the Addington Ministry. William Pitt had resigned and the new Cabinet seemed to wish for peace.

Although these diplomatic conversations were a good omen, they did not attain their end as easily or as happily as had been hoped.

At the very onset England offered considerable resistance in somewhat jarring terms, while Bonaparte wrote or dictated instructions to Joseph in London, and to Otto at Amiens, upon Malta the burning question, the Porte, the Barbary States, and the policing of the Mediterranean.

All these questions caused bitter and heated discussions. Projects were unfolded and both sides endeavoured to gain time by enforcing a dilatory protocol, which only served to prolong and multiply the journeys of their messengers between Amiens and Paris.

The British Cabinet had adopted the primary conditions laid down by the first Consul and Talleyrand,¹ the omission of any negotiation referring to such continental questions as those of the Cisalpine Republic,² Piémont, Switzerland, and Holland.

Her ideas and her interests did not, however, seem to coincide with those of the French Republic.

Bonaparte and Lord Cornwallis had not achieved the necessary results in the course of their numerous inter-

¹ "Pray note that the Government does not wish any mention made of the King of Sardinia, the Stadtholder, or of the Home Affairs of Germany, Holland, and the Republic of Italy. All such matters are completely foreign to our discussions with England" (Talleyrand, letter to Joseph, 20th November, 1801).

² On the morrow of Marengo, Bonaparte had provided the Cisalpine with a provisional Government, and he had directed Maret and Roederer to draw up a Constitution, the plan of which was communicated to Talleyrand by Roederer in the following terms:

"The terms of a Constitution should be brief, and . . ." As he was about to add "clear," Talleyrand interposed, saying, "Obscure, my dear sir, obscure."

views. The First Consul found it difficult to curb his impatience and maintain his diplomatic reserve. He gave strict orders to Talleyrand to add these almost threatening words to the instructions addressed to Joseph, the grand signatory of the Consulate :—

“ We shall be lenient on all points, but not through any sense of fear. I enclose the *Moniteur*, which announces the arrival of our fleet at Saint-Domingo. Conclude matters at once. I repeat, conclude.”

The conclusion could not be effected by the mere will of Joseph. Many objections had still to be overcome, and many proposals and counter-proposals solved before the interested parties could agree.¹

Both might well have been satisfied with the gains obtained. France had recovered all her lost colonies without being asked to effect any restitution herself, while the conclusion of peace afforded fresh conquests to England. It is true she had promised to evacuate Malta, but a promise is not a gift. This was amply proved by the events which followed.

France had dealt very generously with the possessions of others, and had laid embargo upon those of her Allies in order to satisfy the appetite of her most unrelenting enemy. The iniquitous injustices sanctioned by Napoleon at the treaty of Amiens were eventually condemned by Talleyrand.

His correspondence of 1802 proves that when it was signed he paid little attention to the lawful claims of Holland and Spain who had been led into a conflict with England by France for the sake of France alone.²

¹ “ The messenger who brings the news to Paris before nine o'clock on the 10th proximo will receive a gratification of six hundred francs ” (Bonaparte's letter to Joseph, dated the 18th March, 1802).

² Witness the following letters from the Minister to the First Consul :

“ General, “ 20th Messidor, year IX (9th July, 1801).

“ I have carefully read the letter from Spain. It seems to me that Spain, whose enormous pretensions have considerably hampered the Government of Versailles in the case of other treaties, has left our hands considerably free on this occasion. She has shown us herself the line of conduct we must follow, and we can deal with England as Spain has dealt with Portugal. She sacrifices the interests of her

Once more the weak friends were treated as conquered enemies. British pretensions were not yet satisfied. England accused her Ministers of having jeopardised the maritime, industrial, and colonial interests of the Queen of the Seas. Finally, after some formal hesitation, England signed the famous articles of Amiens on 26th March, 1802. She sorely felt the need of a truce, however short.

The signature was impatiently awaited in Paris. It reached the hands of the Minister before those of the First Consul, owing to the following interesting circumstances.

Talleyrand was extremely happy at the result so arduously prepared, and which so often seemed doomed to fail.

He now felt that a good understanding would exist once more between the two nations, which might put an end to the horrors of war. He did not, however, betray his feelings. He remained as calm and collected as ever. He displayed no haste in presenting the text of the treaty to Napoleon, who anxiously awaited it. He preferred to entertain the First Consul about certain details of minor importance, which he knew would be neglected by him later on. This memorable occasion affords a good example of his complete mastery over himself.

Bonaparte was nervous and asked why the signed text had not yet been received from the English Chancery. All the while his Minister had the document in his pocket.

He preserved his usual impassive look, while discussing a number of business matters with the First Consul and going through some necessary routine before dealing with the main point at issue.

Having concluded all he had to do, he smilingly said to

Allies, thus placing Trinidad at her disposal, when discussing our stipulations with England.

“If you endorse this opinion, we should hurry on the negotiations in London, and be satisfied to continue cavilling and hair-splitting in Madrid, indulging in mild discussions and friendly explanations, reassuring her upon the fate of Tuscany, and extolling the advantages of an Alliance. In a word, we should gain time in Madrid and precipitate events in London” (Talleyrand’s letter to Bonaparte, *Pierre Bertrand*, p. 5).

the Head of the State : " I am now going to cause you very great pleasure. Here is the signed treaty."

" Why did you not give it to me at once ? "

" Because if I had, I could not have obtained a hearing from you. When you are happy no one can approach you."

The First Consul did not add a word. He did not wish to betray more emotion than his Minister or perhaps he gathered fresh energy in this silent and forcible possession of himself.

Considered in a wider sense and with the earnest hope that it was not going to prove the fateful instrument that it did become, this treaty was of immense benefit to France to whom it secured peace or at least an indefinite armistice.

Talleyrand had felt this when he said that in 1802 the French Republic enjoyed so much glory and influence that the most ambitious Frenchman could not wish or hope to see his country in a happier position.

The event was celebrated all over France by official rejoicings. On Easter Sunday, the 18th April, both religious and military pomp were requisitioned to acclaim the coming of this blissful dawn. It was ten years since the great bell of Notre-Dame had rent the air with its powerful peals.

In the presence of the illustrious assembly the *Te Deum* was re-echoed by the walls of the Cathedral, which celebrated the twofold peace effected between France and Europe and between France and the Church. Revolution had thus made its peace with God.

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In June, 1800, Bonaparte began to make overtures to Rome through the medium of Cardinal Martinani, Bishop of Vicence. He had conceived the able and politic plan of appearing before the world as the Restorer of Religion and of increasing his authority by means of the political and moral concourse of the French Clergy. He robbed the Royal Pretenders of their best chances by throwing the Churches open and by winning over the untold

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influence wielded by Priests of the Catholic clergy (ever the most zealous upholders of autocratic Governments), to whom he gave back their Hierarchy and their social privileges, while securing their material welfare. He thus established one of the indispensable bases of any Monarchical system which wishes to be a lasting one. It was no real love of doctrine, no sincere or deep-rooted religious impulse that urged the First Consul to accomplish this great act of justice.

This was amply proved by his mercurial statements to the delegates of the Holy See in the discussion of any contentious point or in the fiery vindication of his own prerogatives as Sovereign Head of the State. Later on he afforded further evidence of his true feelings by his violent disputes with the Pope who eventually excommunicated him, notwithstanding the Concordat. His intrinsic genius alone inspired the true motives of this overbearing man, who would readily have become Mohammed's Caliph had he been called upon to rule over Mohammedans. When he endeavoured to conquer Egypt and Syria, he proclaimed his intention of joining the Faith of Islam, in tones so loud that they could be heard by all the tribes who bowed their heads to the laws of the Coran. In 1799 he said to Christians :

“ If I were governing a Jewish nation, I should proceed to rebuild the Temple of Solomon.”

He was possessed of a clear intuition of human sentiments, as befits all rulers who should learn to flatter their subjects and thereby gain more strength and power with which to lead and master them !

Talleyrand had direct and indirect interests to promote in the discussion of the Concordat. He exercised all his influence and all his deftness in its favour until he tried to include in the contract a private and unforeseen clause, “ The Madame Grand clause.” It was promptly rejected, with the result that his excessive zeal very nearly upset all his plans. He had a perfect knowledge of the spirit and the letter of Roman questions. He could have handled them with consummate ability had Fate made him a

leader of the Court of Rome instead of a French diplomat. Was it not he, the Diplomat-Bishop, who said : " In order to secure a good Secretary of State for Rome, you need appoint a bad Cardinal " ? He surely would have been that bad Cardinal !

The Vatican Council appreciated his concourse at its full value. Consalvi, the Roman delegate, often dined with him, and spoke of him in the most flattering terms.

The Holy Father fully endorsed the opinion of his representative, for he was extremely indulgent towards the errors of the late Bishop of Autun, whom he hoped to convert and place in the front rank of the Church's ablest sons.

Pius VII was greatly attracted by Talleyrand's genius and brilliant wit, and he backed up the favourable judgment of Cardinal Consalvi, by replying to him one day : " May God have mercy on M. de Talleyrand's soul, for I am very fond of him." The ex-Prelate was much pleased to hear this, and for very good reasons. Apart from the moral and political reasons which guided him in the matter of the Concordat, he was extremely anxious, for his own sake, to relinquish his false position by making his peace with the Holy See, and obtaining from it, once and for all, the legal right to lead the life of a layman.

At last he obtained the coveted brief which set him free of all ties with his sacerdotal past. It was granted to him partly in good grace, but mainly through diplomatic pressure. He soon interpreted it with a latitude that had never been contemplated by those who conceded it, for he broke his vow of celibacy by conferring upon Madame Grand his hand (if not his heart), together with the title of " Duchesse de Talleyrand-Périgord, Princesse de Bénévent."

We have made it clear that Talleyrand had experienced considerable difficulty in obtaining this papal brief, which contained explicit restrictions that were completely ignored by him. Messengers had carried many texts and counter-texts between Rome and Paris, and numerous letters had been exchanged. Bonaparte himself had to

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intervene three times¹ before Talleyrand was able to bring to a satisfactory conclusion this politico-religious comedy, the epilogue of which was his marriage with "La Belle Indienne."

When he first began his suit at Rome he did not meditate this marriage which he contracted will or nill, but he felt that the day might come when his vow of celibacy would seriously hamper him and he was naturally anxious to free himself from its restraint at the very first opportunity. As early as the 26th of January, 1801, the Abbé Bernier, the Government delegate, propounded the case of the priests whom the Revolution had severed from their sacerdotal calling and who had since got married. The First Consul, prompted by his Minister, thought to solve the matter with one stroke by expressing the wish that a special clause should be added to the Concordat, to the effect that all clergymen who were known to have abandoned their calling should be treated as ordinary citizens.¹

This was a conclusive, simple, and speedy way of settling the matter. But Rome had demurred on reading this suspicious paragraph.

Cardinal Spina, the Representative of the Holy See, spoke summarily to Cardinal Consalvi:—

"I do not know if the Minister Talleyrand wishes to enjoy the benefit of this clause, but I have stated that neither a Bishop nor a Priest bound by solemn vows can ever receive the apostolic indulgence."

A canonical procedure of considerable length was quoted in support of his decision, which was endorsed by Pope Pius VII in the letter he had personally written to Bonaparte.²

¹ Bonaparte threw his whole soul into the matter and wrote thus to the Pope: "I am sending to your Holiness a note which I have received concerning the request for a brief of secularisation in favour of Citizen Talleyrand. This request is particularly agreeable to me" (*Correspondence of Napoleon*, vol. vii, No. 6099, 4th Prairial, year X).

² "As to the absolution of married priests, with the exception of those regulars who are tied by solemn vows, and of bishops, not one of which has ever been the recipient of such indulgence since the foundation of the Church, etc., etc." (Letter of the 12th May, 1801, from

In the whole history of the Church, not a single case could be quoted in which an indulgence had been granted contrary to the primordial rules of ecclesiastical discipline.

Talleyrand still persevered with relentless energy. He urged his request and pleaded his cause by means of every argument, quibble, and subterfuge. When necessary, he hindered conferences upon general questions, aggravated such difficulties as might exist, and endeavoured to wrench the consent of the Holy Father by threatening to advise the First Consul not to pursue negotiations since Rome proved herself so intractable in matters of minor importance.

Rome remained inflexible. The Cardinals showed the greatest deference and respect towards the Minister. They did not even forget to present their respectful homages to Madame Grand,¹ but absolutely declined to discuss the question or to recede from their decision. The Concordat, signed on the 15th July, 1801, did not contain the long wished-for codicil.

Bonaparte's marked insistence, Talleyrand's subtle re-cremations and veiled threats, and the major's reasons invoked by Blanc d'Hauterive, were all in vain.

The prospect of a convention was proposed more than once by the head of the French diplomacy, but even such a tempting offer could not alter the line of conduct of the Holy See.

Talleyrand's failure was followed by fresh passages of arms between the Roman Chancery and himself, by an

Pius VII to Bonaparte. *Documents upon the negotiations of the Concordat*, vol. i, by Boulay de la Meurthe).

Caprara, the papal legate, was Talleyrand's warmest advocate, as much through personal sympathy as through fear of the harm that might ensue to the interests of the Church. The nuncio's sensitive soul was greatly alarmed when he addressed the following heart-rending prayer to Rome:

"So far, the real protectors of Religion and of Mother Church have been the First Consul and M. de Talleyrand. But what can we hope for if the latter is rebuffed?"

¹ "Do not fail to give my compliments to Madame Grand" (Cardinal Consalvi's letter through Cardinal Spina, 23rd September, 1801). "I have seen Mme Grand, who sends you her best wishes" (Spina to Consalvi, 11th October, 1801).

active correspondence with Consalvi and Caprara, and by all sorts of crooked means which he used to get out of this entanglement. Bonaparte began to show ominous signs of impatience. The Holy See was adding to the price of the dispensation numerous and onerous conditions, such as sacramental absolution, and the absolution of censures and excommunication. The last point alone gave rise to numerous difficulties.

Talleyrand little cared whether he was absolved or not. He wished to be set free. This was the object of all his efforts and how it was to be accomplished mattered little to him. With the best dispositions in the world, he, a late deputy of the Constituante, the founder of the Cercle des Feuillants, and a Minister of the French Republic, could hardly play the part of a Republican penitent walking about in sackcloth and ashes. "Heaven is always willing to come to some arrangement," was said long before Voltaire's time.

Bonaparte took the matter in hand, and sent Lefèvre, a cavalry major, to Rome, with a request from the French Government to the Holy See, couched in terms so firm and so precise that their meaning could not be misinterpreted.¹

¹ "The granting of a brief of secularisation to Citizen Talleyrand behoves the dignity of the French Government and will improve the discipline of the Church. This Minister has rendered eminent services to Church and State. He has publicly and definitely resigned the functions and dignities of clerical life. He now desires to have this resignation consecrated and recognised by the supreme chief of his religion, and we hold that he has fully deserved this special favour.

"From a political point of view it is not advisable, now that France has returned to Catholicism, that the Minister who most enjoys the confidence of the Government should be the cause of bitter controversy, owing to his former position and to the uncertainty of the one he now occupies.

"With regard to the efforts he has made to conciliate the Church and the Government, it is only fair that all true friends of religion should be free to testify their gratitude to him as a reward for the zealous way in which he served the interests of the Church. These weighty considerations will doubtless appeal to the benevolence and to the sense of duty of the Holy Father.

"No mention need be made of the formalities required for the accomplishment of this act. His Holiness will proceed in such manner as suits him best. History will afford him numerous examples of parallel cases to the one in hand.

"Camille Panfili, Cardinal, and nephew of the Holy Pontiff, was secularised and died a layman in the seventeenth century, under Pope Innocent the Tenth.

"In the fifteenth century, Cæsar Borgia, Archbishop of Valence,

The Minister appended a letter to the Cardinal Secretary of State, couched in dulcet tones and suggesting the way in which the brief could be drawn up, so as not to alarm the conscience or hurt the feelings of the faithful.

The Vatican was deeply impressed. It was a very hard ordeal that confronted the Apostolic souls.

On the one hand they feared to disregard all orthodoxy by allowing the Bishop of Autun to marry. On the other hand they felt that by refusing to do so, they might excite the wrath of the imperious Chief of the State, make an enemy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and thus compromise the restoration of the Church in France.

The archivists of the Vatican proceeded once more to peruse old requests and musty documents, but when they had done their work they still found themselves in the same state of uncertainty. They could not discover a single text, or a single fact, proving that a dispensation from celibacy could be granted to a late Bishop.¹

became Duc de Valentinois, married a Princess of the House of Albret, and died a layman.

"Ferdinand de Gonzague was first a clergyman and died as Duc de Mantoue Maurice de Savoie, married in 1642, after being ordained. Two Cardinals de Bourbon, uncle and nephew, and both Archbishops of Lyons, resigned their ecclesiastical dignities with the consent of the Holy See and died as laymen.

"Two Casimirs, Kings of Poland, the one by right of succession in the eleventh century, and the other by election in the seventeenth century, were relieved of all clerical ties and all monastic vows. The one had been a Benedictine and the other a Jesuit; the latter not only obtained his release, but also the permission to marry his sister-in-law.

"Henry of Portugal, King of Lisbon and successor to Sebastian's crown, died as King and layman.

"François de Lorraine succeeded to the estates of his brother, and became the father of Leopold. He had also been a clergyman, and remained ever faithful to the Church.

"All these examples are taken from the period during which Rome enjoyed the fullest authority. The use made of it by the predecessors of Pius VII was dictated by motives of utility and by the desire to benefit the Church. Such motives exist to-day and it seems doubtful that a similar request was ever based upon weightier considerations."

¹ Talleyrand did find some, as proved by our previous note, which was no doubt drafted in his study. But such examples as that of Cæsar Borgia were sorry props to a weak-kneed case. Marini, the archivist, had an easy task in discussing their immoral value. He concluded in the words of the famous and able theologian, Di Pietro: "There is no justification, and no valid reason for granting this dispensation."

Yet they did not dare to send a definite *non possumus*. At last the Holy Father granted a brief of limited secularisation, in which there was no mention of marriage. This omission was sufficient proof in itself that it would not be acceptable to Rome.¹

The matter was viewed in a different light in Paris, thanks to the wishes of Bonaparte and to those of Talleyrand himself. The brief was registered in an official and most public manner.² Moreover, it was interpreted in its wider sense, and, notwithstanding the protests of the hierarchy and the bewailings of the Roman Cardinals, it was the general belief that Talleyrand had the right to take a wife from the mere fact that he had been authorised to resume the life of a layman. He had ceased to be a Bishop. Henceforth he was not compelled to hear spiteful allusions to the days when he wore the sacred purple. He felt greatly relieved now that his position had ceased to be ambiguous, but remained in full sympathy with everything of an ecclesiastical nature.

¹ "OFFICIAL DOCUMENT.

"Decree of the Second Fructidor, year X.

"Inasmuch as the brief of Pope Pius VII was delivered at St. Peter of Rome on the 29th June, 1802 ;

"Inasmuch as the Councillor of State entrusted with the conduct of all religious questions has reported thereupon to us ;

"Inasmuch as the Council of State has been heard ;

"The Consuls of the Republic hereby decree that the brief of Pope Pius VII, given at St. Peter of Rome on the 29th of June, 1802, by the terms of which Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand, Minister of Foreign Affairs for France, has been granted the right to resume the life of a Secular and a Layman, shall from this day have full and entire force in all matters concerning the said Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand.

"THE FIRST CONSUL
BONAPARTE."

"The General Secretary,

"H. B. MARET."

² Here is the text of this Pontifical brief, the wording of which is as curious as its contents :

"To our dealy beloved son, Charles-Maurice Talleyrand.

"We were filled with joy when apprised of your ardent wish to be reconciled with us and the Catholic Church. We therefore open unto you the bowels of our paternal charity, and with the plenitude of our power we relieve you from the subjection of all excommunications. In virtue of your reconciliation with us and the Church, we enjoin upon you the distribution of alms for the relief of the poor in your late diocese of Autun. We grant you the right to wear secular clothes and to exercise all civil functions, whether you remain in your present position, or whether you are called upon by your Government to perform other duties."

He never had enjoyed being reminded of the past in his own circle of friends, but was often compelled to remember it and refer to it through the sheer spite of others. Certain habits had altered in the modified and simplified society which had grown up with succeeding régimes. Polite manners were more or less a thing of the past. They were now reduced to their simplest expression. For instance, hostesses did not accompany their lady friends to the door when they rose to leave, but it was still the habit to accompany a Bishop as far as the first door.

He was calling one day on his friend, the Duchesse de Luynes, and as he was about to take leave, her sister-in-law, the Comtesse d'Albret, stood up and reverentially accompanied him.

He understood the secret reason of this, and quite realised that with an air of intense respect she had conveyed to him a bitter reproach. It did not suit his purpose, however, to notice her action, lest he might be christened the "unemployed Bishop."

On another occasion he asked a lady who was calling at the same house to prolong her visit.

"Why leave us so soon?" he said.

Madame Du Bourg-Cronot promptly replied: "We must sometimes think of our salvation, so I am going to Vespers."

"Do you mean to say that you attend Vespers?"

"Why, of course, Monseigneur," and she inclined her head as if to receive his episcopal benediction.

But all this was over now that he was no more exposed to such petty pin-pricks.

Truly religious souls like Mme de Rémusat wished to see his complete reconciliation with Rome. This they thought would have been a fitting solution to the ambiguous moral position into which they said he had been driven by the Revolutionary crisis.

They would have admired his youthful escapades had he but atoned for them in the autumn of his life.

The purple offered to him by Napoleon would have been considered by them as the tardy reward of his brilliant

genius. He would have remained the exalted nobleman by birth and by nature, but would have enhanced the ascendancy of his mind and talents by becoming a member of the Hierarchy. These hopes had been deceived, for he had not consented to be led like a lamb along the road of reparation. Although his line of conduct somewhat hampered his social relations, it was to be admired, inasmuch as it agreed with the statement to which he always adhered, that he never had the slightest clerical vocation.

On the 3rd of May, 1802, Madame de Staël related the following social events to her friend Juliette Récamier :

“Duroc is about to marry Mdlle d’Hervaz, and they say M. de Talleyrand is engaged to Mme Grand. It seems as though Bonaparte wishes everyone to marry, including Cardinals and Bishops.” The last sentence was coined in the realms of fancy, but the rest was the exact truth.

Bonaparte had promoted his Minister’s desire to become a layman with the sole object of enabling him to contract a marriage demanded by his social rank with the lady who for some time had played the part of spouse, not only at his private receptions, but at public functions. The marriage of Talleyrand was a curious episode which provided many tales, but we think it worth our while to relate the true story of it from the very beginning of its anti-matrimonial stage.

As soon as Napoleon became Emperor and Master, he imposed his tyrannical will in matters concerning marriage, a contract in which the liberty of sentiment should be most respected. It is notorious that he arranged marriages for his brothers and sisters and divorced them at will. His courtiers were married by his command. It was a source of pride and satisfaction to him to intervene as an autocrat in these family relations. Everything must yield to his policy or to his arbitrary fancies. He cared nothing for mutual sympathies, for promises given and reciprocated, or for family ties. There was nothing so sacred but must yield to his august will. We cannot dis-



A PORTRAIT OF TALLEYRAND TAKEN IN 1801

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miss this subject without quoting the following proof of our assertions, a proof afforded us by the intimate confidences of an illustrious family. The Imperial exigencies are faithfully set forth in the following case :

Napoleon had conceived the idea of forming the little principalities of the Rhine into one Archduchy. He had decided to appoint as its titular Prince d'Arenberg, one of his favourites. Having sent for him and assured him of his friendship, he said to him abruptly, " You shall marry to-morrow."

" Sir," replied the Prince, " I regret to inform you that I am not free, for my affianced bride expects me to redeem my word, as we are pledged to one another for life."

" Well, get disengaged, for I repeat that you are to marry to-morrow. If you refuse we shall send you to the fortress of Vincennes."

The Prince had to obey. A ball was forthwith arranged, and the marriage took place that same evening in the mansion of Luynes d'Arenberg. The young girl whom Napoleon had disposed of without consulting her had been engaged for two years to M. de Chaumont-Quitry, and they had mutually sworn to disregard the Emperor's orders and to remain faithful to each other ; but it was all in vain ! On the conclusion of the religious ceremony, which took place at midnight, the bride and bridegroom bowed ceremoniously and withdrew separately.

During the many campaigns in which he acted as Napoleon's aide-de-camp Prince d'Arenberg reflected upon the pleasant anomaly of being a husband without a wife, a married man on paper, but a bachelor for all other purposes. This incongruous condition of things lasted until the fall of the Empire, when d'Arenberg obtained a dissolution of a marriage which he had been compelled to contract, but had never consummated !

Napoleon proceeded in the same despotic way when he compelled M. Marbœuf to marry a rich heiress from Lyons, who was first engaged to the Comte Alexis de Noailles and afterwards to Jules de Polignac. He also

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insisted upon the immediate marriage of every girl whose dowry exceeded £2000. He took no heed of sentimental affinities, but proceeded headlong with his family inquisitions which eventually made him so unpopular.

Talleyrand was one of the first victims of Bonaparte's matrimonial mania. Long before he wore a crown he insisted that his Minister should either marry or renounce a liaison which had become too notorious.

The late Bishop of Autun took no heed of ecclesiastical fulminations. Long before the Concordat he had expressed and proved his wish to get married. He first bestowed his attentions upon the captivating Charlotte de Montmorency. He then courted Madame de Buffon, the old friend of the Duc d'Orléans. [But she had declined the offer of such an alliance as she could not overcome her repulsion at the idea of being the wife of a Bishop, secularised or not. He had many more to choose from, but his definite choice fell upon Madame Grand.

It is difficult to say when she first crossed his path, or to understand why she ever became his bride.

"Beauty is a witch," said Shakespeare, and Talleyrand, in common with so many more, soon had the proof that beauty is the most powerful of all magicians. This was his weak point, one traceable throughout his progeny, from Talleyrand to Flahaut, and from Flahaut to Morny.

If he lingered but a few moments, basking in the light of a pretty face, his doom was sealed and all serious thoughts flitted from his mind. This was a form of distraction which he only enjoyed intermittently.

Madame Grand's pedigree was not a brilliant one, and as to her early beginnings, many were bold enough to say, "that her sins had provided for all her wants." We wish to believe that this was a calumny, but we do know that she was an extremely amiable person at the onset of her career. She was born on the 21st November, 1762, at Tranquebar, in India, a trading port then held by Denmark, which now is included in the Madras Presidency.¹ Though born in

¹ The National Archives (F. 75, 946) contain the baptismal certificate of Catherine Worlée. M. de Lacombe found a mistake in it, as 1765 was given as the year of her birth, instead of 1762.

Hindustan, she had another country. When she first came to Paris she claimed to be a Dane, but she was neither Scandinavian nor British. Her father was an official serving the King of France at the Port of Pondichery, and later at that of Chandernagor. She had been christened Catherine-Noël Worlée. During her childhood she was much noticed for her beauty, and even then she could have said, "How pretty I must be, since I have been so well loved." Her development was rapid, as is usual in Eastern countries. Before she had reached her sixteenth year she was *jam matura viro*, and much sought after in marriage. George Francis Grand, of French origin, employed in the East India Trading Company, married her on the 9th of July, 1777. On the 10th they were again twice married by a Catholic and a Protestant clergyman, the one performing the ceremony at one o'clock in the morning, and the other at eight. This marriage, though blessed and re-blessed, did not prove a happy one for all that.

Catherine Worlée's dowry consisted of a few jewels, rare in number, but in nothing else, and about twelve thousand rupees (or £1000). This was not wealth, but she hoped that her husband's business in Calcutta might supply the riches for which she yearned.

Like many women whom nature has fashioned into beings of selfish and frivolous grace, she had a happy way of making her wishes known and of having them complied with. Her husband was a man of a positive and serious nature, who struck her as being dull and colourless. The contrasts of these two beings did not harmonise, as often happens between extremes, for the simple reason that there was no room for love in Catherine's heart. However indolent this beautiful Eastern might be, there seems good reason to believe that she was entitled to consider her conjugal life extremely monotonous, devoid as it was of all fatigue.

Little toll, if any, was levied upon her energies until the coming of Sir Philip Francis, a high official, brought variety into her life, and claimed from her such effusions as she had not yet been asked for.

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Old Calcutta was deeply interested in this event. Francis was then engaged in a violent controversy with Warren Hastings, the Governor-General, but he found time to do homage to the charms of Mme Grand. He was a witty, distinguished, and handsome man. He invited her to his balls and receptions, extolled her beauty and placed it in bold relief, bestowing upon her attentions, compliments, and other offerings of love, the gift of which he had no cause to regret. He soon received a generous reward. He naturally endeavoured to convince his virtuous wife and the simple-minded British public that he had never transgressed the bounds of Platonism. He insisted upon this point in his Memoirs, and in this matter we are inclined to endorse the view that a fault denied is half committed, for his diary contained the dates of some victorious engagements, the description of which can leave no doubt as to the true nature of his relations with Mrs. Grand, to wit, his joyous little note of the 8th of December, 1778:

“This night the devil himself got into the house of J. F. Grand, and there was the devil to pay.”

Thinking that the husband was dining out, Francis had come to spend a peaceful hour with the faithful spouse, but he had the imprudence to leave the ladder against the window, and thus afforded the proof of his sinful audacity.

All the exits to the house were guarded, the guilty man was seized, and energetic hands held him down in a chair of torture the while some friends sought the unhappy husband. It was unforeseen news to him, and it caused him deep emotion. He cried copiously, and ran to tell his trouble to a friend, and then to borrow a sword from another. When he got home, Sir Philip had escaped, thanks to the help of some good Samaritans, who, in his stead, had tied an innocent man into the chair.

Grand thought he could avenge himself by challenging Sir Philip to a duel, but the guilty one did not see the force of crossing swords with him, thereby adding insult to injury. He flatly declared that he knew nothing about the matter and cared less. Having no other redress against the man

who had robbed him of his domestic happiness, Grand brought an action against him for criminal conversation.

Our hero was tried in the High Court of Calcutta by Sir Elijah Impey, who mulcted him in a heavy fine. Grand pocketed the 5000 rupees, and, according to the legal formula, he had to declare himself paid, satisfied, content, and fully compensated!

During the following year Sir Philip carried on most ardent relations with the lady and thus obtained complete revenge at the cost and expense of the husband, an ugly, old and sordid Frenchman, as he described him in his Memoirs. But, alas, there was an end to all this joy and happiness!

In November, 1780, Mme Grand was fired by the desire to vary her impressions once more. She left the delta of the Ganges and sailed for Europe. London did not possess her long. She preferred to settle in Paris, where financial men afforded her ample means of subsistence. We trace her arrival in Paris by the bill of a jeweller, a Palais-Royal jeweller, bearing the date of April, 1782. It amounted to several thousands of francs. She was a subscriber at the Italiens, the *Comédie Française*, and the Opéra. She was dressed by the most fashionable establishments, and her life was certainly not tinged with sadness.

In 1787 she resided in a mansion in the Rue du Sentier, close to the residence of the future Minister of the Legislative Assembly, Valdec de Lessart, who was madly in love with her. Her mother-of-pearl complexion, her voluptuous bearing, her blue eyes shaded by the darkest lids, and the wealthy mass of fair hair, caused the admiration of every man and also of many women.

In 1783 Madame Vigée-Lebrun executed a masterpiece in painting her portrait, which we reproduce as a source of pleasure to artistic tastes.¹

¹ Some very interesting and indiscreet details were given concerning the wonderful wealth of hair which she possessed. We quote the Comtesse de Boigne, who tells us what she learned from her uncle, the handsome Edward Dillon.

"All this occurred in 1787. Edward Dillon was known as 'hand-

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She was leading a happy and peaceful life when the Revolution broke out. She fled to England without money, but also without much anxiety, for she knew she was attractive and could always trust to the unforeseen. A young midshipman, whose name was Nathaniel Belchier, was fired with love the first time he saw her, and forthwith became her slave. She told him of the gold and silver plate, the jewels, the valuables that she had left behind her, and all of which would, of course, be stolen by the looters. Nathaniel did not hesitate, but rushed off to Paris, facing untold dangers to rescue what he could of her property. Paris was then a hotbed of fever and of crime, but the gallant British sailor-boy succeeded beyond the measure of his dreams. A few days later a Patriotic Committee visited the abode of Mme Grand, and drew up inventories of what was left.

Her residence in London was enlivened by some adventures. It could not have been otherwise, considering her personal charms and wonderful beauty, but she regretted Paris. High Society in London did not afford her a warm welcome, although she tried to force its doors by posing as a fugitive Royalist lady. She considered the etiquette and prejudices of this set grossly exaggerated, and resolved to seek elsewhere for toleration. As soon as

some Dillon,' and his title afforded him numberless successes among the beautiful women of the day.

"Madame de Talleyrand, who was at this time Mme Grand, had cast longing eyes at him, but he was then fully occupied elsewhere, and took little notice of her. When, later on, he broke off all relations with his lady-love, he decided to leave Paris and visit the East. Such a voyage was then looked upon as an event, and his decision added further interest to that awakened by his good looks.

"Mme Grand became assiduous in her provocations. On the eve of his departure Dillon consented to sup with her after the opera in her delightful apartment, in which he found all the comfort and refinement of the 'Metier' pursued by Mme Grand. [The use of the word "Metier" was a treacherous side-thrust.]

"She had the loveliest hair in the world. Edward admired it, but she told him that he did not yet realise the full merit of it. She then retired to her dressing-room, and returned with her hair undone and stood completely veiled by it. Besides this, she wore the costume of Eve before weaving was invented, but with somewhat less innocence. She was naked and not ashamed. It was in this costume that the lady partook of supper. The next day Edward left for Egypt" (*Memoirs of the Comtesse de Boigne*, vol. i., pp. 432, 433).

there was a lull in the Revolutionary storm she crossed the Channel and went to Paris.

She was accompanied by a diplomat of the Genoese Republic, one Christoforo Spinola. He had married the daughter of Field-Marshal de Lévis, and was returning to France in the hopes of rescuing some of the property of his father-in-law, who had been guillotined under the Terreur. The couple were only in Paris three days when they had to quit French territory, under a drastic decree of expulsion. Spinola forthwith complied with the order and sailed back to England, but his companion remained in Paris, where even in that short time she had found powerful protectors.

She did not, however, settle down again without experiencing considerable difficulties. She was accused of having brought compromising documents from London, and also letters from emigrants. She was denounced, and had to explain matters to the police. Her position would have become critical but for the intervention of her friend, the Marquise de Sainte-Croix, sister of Talon the Advocate-General, and of a relative of Madame du Cayla, who gave her a letter of recommendation to Talleyrand.

In the meantime she was suspected of other machinations, arrested, and thrown into prison. The Minister then pleaded for her, and wrote on the 23rd of March, 1798, asking Barras, the Director, to order her immediate release.

The following contents of the letter proves that even at this early stage Talleyrand's feelings towards her were much akin to those of love :

“ Citizen Director, Madame Grand has just been arrested upon a charge of conspiracy. She is the one person in Europe who is utterly incapable of taking any part or interest in politics. A beautiful Indian lady, beautifully lazy, she is the most inactive woman I have ever met.

“ I ask you to interest yourself in her behalf, as I am sure there is not a tittle of reason for prosecuting this

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matter, which I should very much regret to see brought into the light of day.

“ Writing to you from man to man, I can confess that I love her, and I state of my knowledge that she has never taken the slightest part in any business whatsoever. She is a true Indian, and you know how Indian women hold aloof from all intrigues.

“ Salutes and friendship.

“ [Signed] CHARLES-AURICE TALLEYRAND.”

Barras declined to take upon himself the responsibility of releasing her. The question had to go before the Council as a matter of course. The five Directors must decide whether they would keep or release their prisoner. Unfortunately, they were ill-disposed towards Talleyrand. Barras had no sooner spoken than Rewbell violently opposed him. He inveighed against the petition, and in violent terms of hatred he once more indicted Talleyrand for his audacity and immorality :

“ There is the vile Priest for you ! ” he said. “ He thinks that France is still a monarchy, that he is still the agent of the Clergy, and that he can act according to his sweet will. He apparently forgets that he is a servant of the Republic, housed in one of its buildings, and that he should at least observe the decency of his position, if he is not imbued with the dignity of it.”

He became more and more excited, giving further vent to his animosity. Not only should this impudent request be rejected, but the Government should avail itself of this golden opportunity and rid itself of this undesirable individual. He urged that the appointment of this man, bereft alike of honour and morality, should be cancelled forthwith. If not, the Republic would be closely identified with the actions and character of the late Bishop, who had been an object of contempt under the old régime and was more despised than ever since he had become a Minister of the Republic !

After Rewbell came Merlin, the innocent Merlin, whose foible it was to boast at all times of his real or supposed good fortunes at the hands of the ladies.

He now posed as a resuscitated Cato, as a strong upholder of virtue. What incensed him most against Talleyrand was his having gone out of France to find a mistress, to India, indeed, as if there were not enough women in Paris, both charming and expert in the bestowal of such favours as the Minister might care to receive! Merlin concluded that this alliance between a Frenchman and an Indian woman was a political one, fraught perhaps with dire consequences to the commonwealth.

From such premises it was readily deduced that Talleyrand was sold to England, having become an active agent of the enemy and that Madame Grand was but his intermediary.

François de Neufchâteau was the only one who showed any indulgence towards Talleyrand, whose loose code of immorality was shared by him. Furthermore, the two men were lame!

“No private sanctuary should ever be violated,” he declared. He was rudely interrupted by the fiery Rewbell. Then came the turn of La Réveillère-Lepeaux. He made some remarks which so infuriated Rewbell that they very nearly came to blows. Barras then rose, the pure and chaste Barras, who declared himself much scandalised, but suggested that the matter should be referred to the Minister of Police, knowing full well that this official must yield to the wishes of the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

As soon as Madame Grand was released, she sought a fresh audience with her protector. The statesman was now completely seduced and captivated by the animation of her blue eyes (the deceiving mirrors of an intelligence much less bright than themselves), by the warm tints of her beautiful hair, by her graceful figure, and the natural undulations of her Eastern deportment.

In his presence she had spoken but a few words, thus avoiding the risk of committing mistakes of language. She told him that the object of her visit was to express her gratitude to M. de Talleyrand, and to increase her indebtedness towards him by seeking the further favour of a

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passport to England. She did not urge this request, however, when told by the Minister that she need not cross the Channel again, but could remain in comfort and safety under his fond tutelage. He added that Paris was a much more desirable residence for her than London and invited her to visit him often at the Foreign Office. Far from refusing the offer, she accepted it so eagerly that there and then he invited her to take up her permanent abode under his roof.

The incident was commented upon by the Press which as usual discounted the future by announcing the forthcoming marriage of the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Madame Grand's first object was to legalise her own position. She had not yet obtained a divorce. She pleaded with the magistrates of the Republic that she was entitled to one. For the last five years her husband had given no sign of life.

The Republican laws were most accommodating on this chapter, with the result that her marriage which had been celebrated at Calcutta on the 9th of July, 1777, was annulled on the 7th of April, 1798, in the Town Hall of the 11th Ward. Now that she was unfettered, she could caress the hope of a much more brilliant union. She received proofs of kindness at the hands of the authorities. Her name was removed from the list of emigrants on the 2nd Floréal of the year VIII,¹ and she recovered possession of such of her property as had not been transferred. She was allowed to invoke either the French or the Danish nationality.²

In a word, fortune smiled on her.

Talleyrand had not foreseen that his relations could ever become permanent with a woman whose most impressive charms consisted of the brilliancy of her eyes and the symmetrical beauty of her body.

¹ Eighth month of the Republican Calendar, April 20th to May 20th.

² She was described as Catherine-Noël-Worlée, late Grand, a native of Denmark. (Reports of Consular Decisions; National Archives, A. F. iv. 4; National Archives, F. 75, 946, personal dossier of Madame Grand.)

He became attached to her and almost faithful. Beautiful women who had been his friends in the past twitted him with having been taken prisoner by the Dutch colonies, asserting at the same time that they did not exactly know whether the lady was Danish, French, Indian, or Batavian. He now and then indulged in a little diversion, especially with Élise Moranges, who married Dorinville the financier. The husband became aware of this love adventure which he quite failed to appreciate, but soon afterwards he and his wife separated on account of other grievances.

Madame Grand was now permanently settled at the Hotel de Galliffet.

Talleyrand had done things like the nobleman that he was. He proceeded to close the mouth of Citizen Grand, who had come to enjoy a stroll in Paris.¹ He provided him with a golden gag. He was thus enabled to keep the lovely Catherine by his side and avoid all conjugal recriminations. The lovely Indian was henceforth officially recognised as the Minister's titular mistress. Her position as such would have been tolerated had her beauty and physical charms been enhanced by some education. Public opinion soon concluded that the latter attainment was remarkable by its absence only, while in private life, Talleyrand soon realised that her nature and temper were both most variable.

Talleyrand was most sensitive and suffered acutely when compelled to assist at the cruel murder of accident and syntax. To him it seemed that faults of language were extremely grievous ones and her ignorance caused him the pain of a thousand deaths. There was nothing he prized more than peace in his home. She disturbed that peace by her fantastic pranks and follies. He tried to cultivate patience by nibbling at the savoury and luscious fruits which she provided and consoled himself with the thought that the contract was not indissoluble and that

¹ He had taken up his abode in the Rue Richelieu, at the Hotel du Cercle, with the object, he said, of visiting the city and its monument, but he seemed inclined to prolong his stay indefinitely.

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he could free himself when he chose. He had not foreseen that Napoleon's orthodox and moral scruples would long rivet him to her.

For the nonce he was content to overlook her intellectual defects, inasmuch as he considered himself amply compensated by the three qualities she possessed, qualities which, in his opinion, tended to complete a woman: a soft skin, sweet breath, and a sweet temper. The latter was subjected, however, to certain little changes ever present in the daughters of Eve. He found amusement and repose in the company of one whom he looked upon as a charming, transient companion. He had yet to learn that this admirable creature, bereft of brain and common-sense, was not a bird of passage, but one who meant to give practical effect to the motto, "*J'y suis, j'y reste.*"

He found in her a pleasant contrast to the philosophical Mme de Staël. He looked at her from a lover's point of view only and was therefore entitled to smile. In her low-cut velvet bodice which displayed a marble bust, and with her incomparable tresses, dressed by Charbonnier the artistic *coiffeur*, Catherine was really the incarnation of freshness and of beauty.

Slowly and deliberately he foresaw the day when this delightful vision would naturally vanish from his life. He was already studying the most elastic means of loosening the ties which must eventually impede his course but he hesitated to adopt a decision, postponing till the morrow that which it was irksome to do to-day, when an unforeseen incident altered all his plans.

A Reception of Foreign Ambassadors by the Minister of Foreign Affairs was being discussed by the Directors. They were at a loss to know who could act as Talleyrand's hostess and do the honours of the Foreign Office to these exalted ladies, who had all shuddered with indignation at the very thought of having to curtsy to Madame Grand, a married woman and yet a spinster, living under the roof of a concubinary Bishop!

The discussion upon this question became embittered, and its echoes reached the ears of Bonaparte, who put a



MADAME GRAND, PRINCESSE DE TALLEYRAND

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stop to it by ordering Talleyrand to banish his mistress forthwith from his official residence. He would have submitted had he alone been concerned in the matter. She, however, was not prepared to obey the edict, though in later years she was doomed to show much more resignation.

As soon as he referred to the matter which he endeavoured to explain as the painful, but necessary result of circumstances, she flew into a paroxysm of rage and shrieked loudly. She then sought Joséphine, whose heart always melted at the sight of tears, and craved an audience with the First Consul. She told him her sad, pathetic case, and falling on her knees implored him to rescind a decision which broke her heart. Her grief lent additional beauty to her features. Bonaparte was good enough to console her, and when she became a little calmer, he said: "I can only see one way out of this difficulty. Unless Talleyrand marries you, you must not again set foot in this house, and remember that whatever happens, I never go back on my word."

Her hopes were revived at the mention of marriage and she decided to endeavour with all her might to legalise a position held by her on sufferance, thanks to the indulgence of the public. When she returned, Talleyrand had already been informed that he must make up his mind within twenty-four hours. While pretending to safeguard propriety and common decency in his own surroundings, Napoleon was really pleased to be able to play a trick upon Talleyrand.

However true it may be that when two desires become united there can be no self-pride in love, matters alter sensibly when complicated by the obligations and the duration of marriage. Talleyrand was tormented at the thought of these complications and rebelled against the exigencies of his despotic master, but he still preserved affection and some pity for the woman he had bidden to his side. He had not yet come to a definite decision when he was confronted by the tyranny of a woman's tears. She cried, protested and implored until Talleyrand, addled by her bewailings, gave his tired consent.

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The 9th of December, 1802, was a great day for Madame Grand. The marriage settlement, by which the larger portion of Talleyrand's fortune accrued to her, was signed in his handsome villa at Neuilly, in the presence of his brothers, Archambaud and Boson de Périgord, of the three Consuls, Bonaparte, Cambacérès, and Lebrun, of Joséphine de Beauharnais, of Maret, the State Secretary, and of two public notaries. On the following day the future bride and groom repaired to the Town Hall of the 10th Ward, accompanied by their witnesses. Roederer, President of the Home Department of the Council of State, and Vice-Admiral Bruix, were the husband's witnesses, while General Beurnonville and Radyx Sainte-Foix were those of the wife. Prince de Nassau-Siegen, a mutual friend of the contracting parties, also signed the register.

The religious ceremony was performed as quietly as possible. They had found a priest willing to marry them at Epinay, a remote village in the valley of Montmorency.

Everything was now in order with Church and State. The marriage was announced far and wide and henceforth the Ambassadors could raise no objections on matters of principle, though they continued to slander and backbite their fellow-woman.

Diplomatic receptions were held in due form and Talleyrand had to endure Mme Grand, now exalted by her new status and her forthcoming titles. This hasty marriage, which had been contemplated so long, recalls a saying of Louis XV, who, on hearing that one of his courtiers had married his mistress, exclaimed, "The adventure could not have had a better ending."

Certain sources of worry had been kept secret. The late Calcutta husband was not as far away from Paris as might have been desired, and it was feared that he might at any time become an importunate solicitor.

Talleyrand's influence had obtained for him the position of Dutch representative at the Cape of Good Hope. He

seemed in no hurry to join his post, but remained in Amsterdam, within easy reach of Paris.

Shortly before her marriage the future Madame de Talleyrand entertained the following guests at Neuilly : M. and Madame Fox, Sir Elijah Impey, the President of the Calcutta Court who had fined Sir Philip Francis 50,000 rupees upon the count of criminal conversation, and M. Grand, her former husband, whose anger had quite subsided. Beside him sat Sir Philip Francis, his wife's first lover, and Talleyrand, who little suspected then that he would soon be the legitimate successor of both. The greatest cordiality reigned among the guests, who had so much in common. Circumstances had now altered, and the same relations could no more be tolerated.

The Minister of the French Republic had obtained, as we said, the appointment of M. Grand at the Cape, with a salary of 2000 florins. This had been granted through the courtesy of the Dutch Foreign Minister. We have also said that Grand the titular was in no hurry to take up his functions, and as his late wife objected to his settling in Holland, she sent the following letter to Mr. Van der Goes. It is an extremely able document coming from the pen of one whose intelligence was considered limited, but it was very likely dictated to her by one whose genius was practically unlimited.

“ Sir,—I hasten to thank you for all the kindness you have shown to M. Grand, at my request.

“ You acceded to my wishes in such a graceful way that I feel I am not asking you in vain to grant me a further favour. Would you, therefore, be so good as to instruct M. Grand to sail at once, as the prolongation of his sojourn in Amsterdam might prove highly inconvenient? He has already been there a full month, and his presence in your capital is more than ill-timed. I shall feel much obliged if you will forward his sailing orders to Messrs. R. & T. de Smeth, at Amsterdam. Please accept my anticipated and warmest thanks, and the assurances of my sincere regards,

“ [Signed] TALLEYRAND-PÉRIGORD, *née* WORLÉE.”

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This imperious request was at once acceded to, and learning that Mr. Grand had been sent on his way, she forwarded the following grateful letter to the obliging Dutch statesman. It is dated the 13th Nivôse, year XI: ¹

“ Monsieur de Talleyrand is as grateful as myself for all your kindness. He bids me repeat what I have already written to you concerning his dispositions towards you and wishes me to express his earnest desire to afford you a proof of his consideration and esteem.”

Fired with pride by her social regeneration, she added: “ You will observe, sir, by the name which my marriage with M. Talleyrand entitles me to bear, that the tender and sincere affection of this amiable man has made me the happiest of women.”

Her hopes had been fulfilled, but the same could not be said of the statesman who had made her the partner of his destiny and exalted position.

When he presented his wife at Court, Bonaparte remarked to her with his usual crudeness that he sincerely hoped she would learn to respect the position to which she had been promoted. She remained silent, dumb-founded by the apostrophe, but her husband answered for her. His reply was incisive, but so polite that it brooked no answer and gave no rise to anger:

“ Madame de Talleyrand will endeavour to shape her conduct in all things upon that of the Empress Joséphine.”

Napoleon and his Minister had gone through the same pre-matrimonial course! ²

The Emperor's behaviour towards Talleyrand varied daily according to the interests at stake or to the temper of the Master, who could be rough or caressing, affable or

¹ Fourth month Republican Calendar, December 10th to January 10th.

² Another version added that she herself promised to follow the example of the late Citizeness Bonaparte, when Napoleon advised her to obliterate the frivolities of Madame Grand by the faultless behaviour of the Duchesse de Talleyrand. “ I shall follow the example of the Citizeness Bonaparte in all these things.”

If these words were ever spoken by her, they threw a cruel light upon the antecedents of Joséphine, which were often discussed in confidence by Barras and General Hoche (*The Memoirs of Barras*, vol. ii.).

intractable. Sometimes he anticipated his Minister's wishes, and at other times he was not approachable. He did not trouble to alter his manner towards Mme de Talleyrand. It was uniformly frigid, if not wilfully hostile and he never concealed the fact that her presence was most unwelcome on State occasions, when he grudged her the precedence and privileges due to her rank. He eventually forbade her to attend the receptions of the Empress. His action was not dictated by retrospective scruples or personal reasons, but he had learned that she had received a hand-over of £4000 from some Genoese merchants, in exchange for certain commercial advantages which she was to obtain for them through her husband's influence and position. This was the official explanation of his drastic action.

Talleyrand resigned himself to the inevitable, as if he ignored all these occurrences, but he carefully nursed the incident in the recesses of his memory, adding it to other causes of vexation which he harboured against the Emperor notwithstanding their apparent friendship.

It seemed evident to Talleyrand's friends that he had lent himself to this union either through condescension or through weakness. He had explained the motives of his choice in many witty ways and by very clever feints, but it was common knowledge that the selfsame choice had been *commanded*, not voluntary. In the minds of his guests and of the occupants of the gallery, the part played by such a man and his general bearing were seriously handicapped by his being tied to a woman reputed to have but the mere shadow of a reputation. She did not speak his language and he could not understand her phraseology. She had risen to such heights that she was completely dazed. She was credited with an extraordinary want of tact, with the committal of awful mistakes and the use of words and expressions which at times made her hearers wish that they could be swallowed by Mother Earth. All those who knew her prayed that she might only open her mouth in order to eat. On one occasion she scandalised a roomful of guests by loudly calling upon the late Bishop of

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Autun, her husband, to come and admire a diamond *pectoral cross* which she had just purchased. When advised by a friend to add larger pearls to the ear-rings she was wearing, she exclaimed, "You must remember that I married a Bishop, not the Pope."

We recall the following well-known story, lest we might be supposed to ignore it :

She had lately read the story of Robinson Crusoe, and when the English diplomat Sir Henry Robinson called upon her, she tenderly inquired how he had got over the fatigues of his journey, and what he had done with his man Friday.

On such trying occasions Talleyrand saved the situation by giving expression to some philosophical thoughts upon the untold difficulties of his position.

Montrond, his intimate friend, asked him how Madame Grand had ever won him with such a paucity of talent !

"My dear sir," he replied, "Madame de Staël afforded me such an amount of intelligence and wit that I thought I could commit sufficient excesses in the opposite direction." He knew full well that this saying would travel far and wide.

On another occasion he stated that on principle a man of brains should marry a fool !

"The stupid actions of a foolish woman only compromise herself, but the indiscretions of an intelligent woman compromise her husband." He added : "Anyone endowed with sufficient imagination can always find reasons with which to oppose reason itself."

The numerous tales told at the expense of Madame de Talleyrand did not lose in the telling, but how far they were apocryphal will never be known. If we are to accept the evidence of the Comtesse Potočka, Mme de Cazenove d'Arlens, the Comtesse de Rémusat, and General Thiébaud, she was both vain and empty-headed. On the other hand, Michaud, who was no thurifer of Talleyrand and his circle, has asserted that her conversation was quite passable. Madame de Chastenay, who knew her well, declared that she had never in her presence made use of a

single sentence in bad taste or expressed stupid opinions of any sort. On the contrary, this witness has stated that Mme de Talleyrand was uniformly polite and that her conversational powers were quite equal to those of many ladies whom no one could have accused of lack of intelligence. That she was not well-read is quite true, but it is also true that Talleyrand did not marry her on account of her literary genius. Yet she displayed a taste for reading and possessed a library, very ill-assorted, perhaps, but containing some few good books. She suffered all her life from the effects of the very summary education she received in Calcutta, for her mind was completely void of any notions, whether geographical or historical.

When transplanted into the life of Europe she unwittingly preserved the heedless temperament of an Eastern woman. Her thoughts were as indolent as her gestures, and it was a difficult thing to shape such a ponderous nature as hers.

Her correspondence with Millin, Louis de Beer and M. de San-Carlos proved that she was able to write very good letters. Her *billets-doux* were not enamelled with more mistakes in spelling than those of many great dames like the Comtesse de Polastron, the smiling friend of the Comte d'Artois. If she was really so insignificant a woman, it seems strange that she should have captivated Sir Philip Francis, one of the ablest and wittiest Englishmen of the day, and that she should have succeeded in becoming the wife of the greatest diplomat of his time, having steered her craft of destiny through many strenuous storms. She did not deem herself a fool and she even made fun of the man who was her husband, referring to him in her letters as the "Reverend Club Foot, her adoring Master." ¹

This can hardly be called a witticism, but it served her purpose against one who seldom spared her feelings.

The gossips of the day were anxious, no doubt, to accentuate the enormous difference that existed between

¹ L'Abbé Piébot (*Pied bot* is the French for club-foot). (Adapter's note.)

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these two beings. With that motive, they apparently attributed to innate stupidity many doings and sayings caused by ingenuous ignorance and lack of education in one whose slips mistakes and strange actions were carefully noted by the kind friends of Talleyrand. There were many other stories related at her expense. Someone asked her what part of the world she came from and she answered innocently, "*Je suis d'Inde.*"¹ "*Je suis d'Inde*" sounded like "I am a goose."

Thomas Moore, the English poet and delightful cosmopolitan, was dining with Mme de Talleyrand when she made this mistake. He christened her "*La Princesse d'Inde,*" but testified to the very graceful compliment which she paid him about the beauty of Bessy, his wife, whom she knew he worshipped.

This would-be silly woman invited many men of letters to her receptions and listened attentively to their readings, even to those of tragedies.²

Her sins were mainly due to ignorance and in many matters of which she knew nothing she had the sublime confidence often born of great beauty. She was quite uneducated, but in this she resembled many women in the best society who did not know a bit more than she did and whose only subjects of conversation were social slander and gossip, theatres and dress. They escaped comment because of their Parisian vivacity and the self-confidence which enabled them to glide over all difficulties and skate with impunity on the thinnest ice.

This marriage of Talleyrand proved as inglorious as it was uncanonical. He soon became thoroughly bored. He did not betray the fact to anybody, for he never conversed upon his domestic matters. His haughty, stand-off

¹ "I am from India." The sentence should run "*Je suis de l'Inde.*" A pun was forthwith made upon *d'Inde*, pronounced like *Dinde*, which means a goose.

² Viennet, an old-fashioned writer was reading his interminable tragedy entitled "*Achille.*" He was proceeding with ample gesture and deep voice, when a leaf of his manuscript was blown into the middle of the room. He continued his declaration, saying in grave tones, "Great God, what fresh misfortune has now visited me!" The audience roared with laughter, and the reading was postponed unto the Greek calends. (Adapter's note.)

manner kept the world at bay. Upon the matrimonial chapter he was silent, because he was not a man who could bear to be pitied by other men.

His home-life became monotonous, so he sent to London for a little girl named Charlotte, the daughter of a lady friend who had requested him to look after her child.

Some have said that his relations towards his protégée were those of a father towards a daughter, but this is another matter upon which no certain data are available. He spared no effort to afford her the best education and bestowed the greatest care upon her, until he adopted her and gave her his name, when she reached the age of seventeen. He afterwards married her to his cousin, the Baron de Talleyrand.

Another lady soon came on the scene. She was destined to occupy a prominent position in the household that became her abode, for she soon shared the thoughts, occupations, and intimate life of the statesman. This was his beloved niece, Dorothee de Courlande, Comtesse Edmond de Périgord, and later Duchesse de Talleyrand-Périgord, Princesse de Sagan, Duchesse de Dino. On the very day of her arrival, the position of the lawful spouse was in jeopardy. Madame Grand, Princesse de Bénévent, ceased to exist as the wife of the Duc de Talleyrand.

Until 1814 Madame de Talleyrand continued to do the honours of the *salon* in which the most eminent representatives of Europe forgathered after midnight. What remained of her former beauty was severely handicapped by stoutness, and she had assumed a somewhat stiff and haughty air which she considered in keeping with her high station. She was not able to assert it very long in her husband's house. She foretold the fact herself when she witnessed her husband's departure for the Congress of Vienna, accompanied by his Secretaries and the Comtesse Edmond de Périgord, of whom he had grown passionately fond.

She had been informed that this journey was pre-

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arranged and that it had been discussed in a country-house a few miles from Paris. The news upset her so seriously that it was a long time before she recovered from its effects.

She decided not to see Talleyrand again, but went out of his life, thereby obeying his wish, without resistance, recrimination, or reproach.

With an amount of common sense with which she had not been credited, she deemed it wiser not to amuse the world by giving publicity to her conjugal misfortunes. She meekly consented to take the compensation offered in the shape of an income of 30,000 francs a year and an estate at Pont-de-Sains, in Belgium, the gift of her princely husband. She spent her winters in Brussels.¹

She returned to Paris a few years later, sad, forsaken, morose and very ill. Her behaviour remained calm, discreet and conciliatory. Her name was never mentioned at Valençay or in the Rue Saint-Florentin until her death was announced. The funeral oration, delivered on that occasion by the members of Talleyrand's household, was as brief as it was heartless: "What a relief!"²

While studying the history and intimate life of Mme de

¹ "Madame de Talleyrand was very reasonable and in no way grasping in the discussion of this transaction. She spoke the following remarkable words to my mother :

"I am paying the penalty for having yielded to self-pride. Knowing as I did the real attitude of Mme Edmond de Périgord towards Monsieur de Talleyrand in Vienna, I sternly refused to be a witness to it. This is the reason why I did not join him, when Napoleon's return from Elba compelled me to leave Paris. If I had gone to Vienna then, instead of to London, M. de Talleyrand would have been compelled to receive me. I know him well and I make bold to say that he would have greeted me most politely. The more my presence would have annoyed him the less he would have shown it. I knew all this, but I loathe the woman. I yielded to myself and I was wrong. I was wrong to think that he was too weak to hunt me from his side. I had miscalculated the courage of cowards in the absence of their opponents. I have made a mistake and will suffer the consequences, but I do not mean to make things worse by fighting the impossible. I mean to submit, and M. de Talleyrand may be assured that I shall avoid all scandal'" (*Memoirs of the Comtesse de Boigne*, pp. 226, 227).

² In the second volume of this work, we shall relate the last years of Mme de Talleyrand's life in our chapters upon the Duchesse de Dino.

Talleyrand and of the Prince her husband, we have lost sight of general events which took place under the Consulate in the year 1802.

We return to their consideration in the following chapter.

CHAPTER VII

THE DAWN OF THE EMPIRE

1802—Fouché's downfall causes intense satisfaction to Talleyrand—The influence at that time wielded by the Minister of Foreign Affairs—The Courtier and the politician—Talleyrand becomes the intermediary between the nobility and the Master of the Tuileries—The beginning of the Consular Court—Revival of social life—The *salons* of the day—M. de Talleyrand and the Princesse de Vaudemont—His receptions at the Hotel de Galliffet—The part he played during this brilliant period of the Consulate—His early apprehensions concerning Bonaparte's future relations with Europe—Talleyrand alters the course of France's foreign policy—The Peace of Amiens is denounced—The last year of the Consulate—The death of the Duc d'Enghien—Imputations made against Talleyrand's character—The real historical truth concerning them.

THE period between the years 1801 and 1802 was a very busy one in the life of Talleyrand. The signature of the Peace of Amiens and of the Concordat, the obtainment by surprise of the brief which once more gave him the rights of a layman, and last, but not least, the definite tying of the marriage knot, the *vinculum matrimonii*, were important events crowded into the space of a few months. The disgrace of Fouché, which was most gratifying to Talleyrand, concludes the list of these events.

He witnessed the downfall of the officious Minister of Police, who had to yield to public resentment notwithstanding the skilful defence set up by Joséphine, his powerful protectress. The same Fouché who was soon to work with all his might for the proclamation of the Empire, had violently opposed the resumption of a life-dictatorship under the guise of a permanent Consulship. He had caused grave displeasure by adducing reasons of political prudence in vindication of his opposition.

He had incurred other reproaches. Bonaparte's advisers mentioned Fouché in connection with the Bernadotte conspiracy, which was wilfully ignored by the Government, and for which he alone was blamed. Roederer, Lucien, Joseph, Talleyrand, none of whom were his friends, vied in their endeavours to magnify the fact that he made little effort to suppress the public slanders of the Republican Party but was on the best of terms with Royalist families whose opposition to the Government was known to be of a most compromising nature.¹

He had carefully refuted their imputations and soothed the anger of the First Consul, who resented his combative attitude, the turbulent way in which he managed his department, and his fatal habit of interfering in Bonaparte's family affairs, thereby acting as the indispensable adviser when his services were not sought. Joséphine, ever ready to further the interests of others, supported him on the grounds of his unimpeachable fidelity. He was about to return to favour when Talleyrand and his friends brought fresh charges against him. They depicted the Citizen Fouché in the light of a dangerous optimist, likely to compromise the existing régime by his many condescensions and his inactivity.

Bonaparte took little interest in such matters outside his own sphere as did not exclusively concern his own interests.

Having read a report written by the Police Inspectors upon their Chief, he said before Regnault, who repeated his words far and wide :

“ Yes, there is no happy medium for Citizen Fouché. He must either swim in blood or fall asleep in a bower of

¹ Dukes and Peers who played whist in the *salons* of the Duchesse de Luynes sought the honour of being Fouché's partners, and of misleading their adversaries by his help (Peltier, London, 4th February, 1802).

The strange favours conferred upon the unconventional are fully dealt with in the following memoirs :

The Duchesse de Guiche : *Voyage de la Duchesse de Guiche* ; Mme Récamier : *Souvenirs et Correspondence* ; Bardoux : *Mme de Custine* ; Louis Madelin : *Fouché*, vol. i.

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roses. As I have no need for either of these pursuits, I have no more need for him ; he must go."

He temporised for several days and endeavoured by significant allusions, to make his Minister understand the advisability of his resigning. When he saw that the resignation was not forthcoming, he had recourse to stringent methods. On the 27th Fructidor, Cambacérès, the Second Consul, informed Fouché that the Council had decided that morning to do away with the Ministry of Police.¹

Talleyrand was avenged, for Fouché had done his utmost to replace him by Louis de Narbonne at the head of Foreign Affairs.

Relations had been strained between them since the 18th Brumaire, and it was common knowledge that they waged war silently upon one another. This was not due to real animosity, for such sceptics as they did not indulge in such weaknesses. Their ambitions clashed, and there was never enough room in this world for both of them. Fouché's disgrace was really a gilded one. Bonaparte had yielded to his brothers by removing him from the Ministry of Police, but he gave him a large monetary indemnity and the very remunerative Senatorship of Aix, which carried with it the possession of valuable lands. The First Consul informed Fouché that he would have recourse to his secret services whenever he needed them, and told him that he might recall him at any moment. Talleyrand was too clever not to know that a man of Fouché's ability would easily get into the saddle again. Fouché himself had no doubt whatever about it. As he left he said jokingly to one of his friends, " They will have a fine fright the day I return." For the nonce, the Royalist Jacobin had been removed, and Talleyrand could breathe more freely.

¹ Judge General Régnier, who was created Duc de Massa, was placed at the head of the Ministries of Justice and of Police, which became one department (Thibaudeau, *History of the Consulate Maltre*, p. 47).

Next to the First Consul, he was now the most telling personality in the Republic. His subtle brain mastered every diplomatic question. His wonderful command of the language enabled him to present facts, the acceptance of which was necessary, in a manner much more convincing than that of the imperious formulas of Bonaparte. He possessed many sources of influence through his cosmopolitan relations and his numerous acquaintances among Pressmen, financiers, and business men, while much strength accrued to him from the fact that he was both a courtier and a politician. It was in this dual capacity that he helped Bonaparte to construct the framework of his power. Though he had deviated from the great aristocratic traditions and wandered into the by-ways of Revolution, he had never renounced the society of his Peers, whose manners and dealings always commended themselves to him, though he did not share their views. He was in favour of winning over and propitiating the aristocracy, who would thus become his confederates and he spared no effort in persuading the nobility to frequent the Tuileries.

This was a matter to which Bonaparte lent a great deal of importance.¹

So keenly was he interested that he always asked Talleyrand for the list of his guests and for full details concerning them, with a view to inviting them to his own receptions,² which still affected Republican austerity to

¹ He was once heard to say, "I would like my Court to be always frequented by the nobility; that indeed would be a source of pleasure to me. Swashbucklers are only useful on the battlefield." He added the following remark, which was far from flattering for the patrician families:

"Civility is the effect of habit among old families, the members of which are all courtiers, from father to son. They learn their trade while sucking their nurse's milk."

² "Citizen Consul, I have the honour to enclose the list of non-dancing ladies who attended the reception of the 6th Ventôse. Mmes d'Aiguillon, Bezenech, Bourgoing, Bruix, Canteleu, Castellane (*née* Chabot), Crillon (*famille de*), Custine, de Dreux, du Clusel, Flahaut, de Fleurieu, de Jaucourt, de Jumilhac, de Lameth, de La Rochefoucauld (*née* Rohan-Chabot), de Noailles, Reichstein, de Ségur, de Vaines, de Vergennes, de Witt (*née* Pelletier Saint-Fargeau).

"8 Ventôse, an IX (27th February, 1801).

"(Signed) CHARLES DE TALLEYRAND."

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a certain degree. A remedy was soon found for this state of things. Bonaparte's first object was to eliminate certain people whose presence was as irksome at the Luxembourg as it proved to be later when he took up his abode in the palace of the ancient kings of France.

Among the outcasts was Madame Tallien, whose name was the first to be struck off the list. Joséphine did her best, and pleaded hard that she might be spared this insult, for she remembered the services rendered by her on the morrow of the "Terreur." She considered that those now in power had contracted a deep debt of gratitude towards one who had served them so faithfully, but she forgot that power destroys the memory of favours received.

In answer to her request, Bonaparte remarked that "Notre-Dame de Thermidor" had such an unenviable reputation that Joséphine must not frequent her any more. The victim of this arbitrary decision felt it most keenly when she was precluded from visiting her old companion, who had long shared her pleasures and her joys. They met in the afternoons, and recalled many recollections which were still fresh in their memories. General Bonaparte had not always despised the Citizeness Tallien. Did he forget that morning which followed the 10th Thermidor, when Tallien threw open the door of the cell in which Joséphine awaited death at any moment? Was it not Tallien who had fed the children of Joséphine during her long captivity?

Bonaparte was not then a Consul, but now it suited him to forget the past. Joséphine heard Madame Tallien's complaints, but could not act.

She made a last effort, but Napoleon cut her short. "Madame Tallien," he said, "is to blame for her past conduct, and also for her present conduct."

He did not forgive her intimacy with Ouvrard, the financier and promoter, who had incurred his displeasure because he deemed him a source of danger to the State,

owing to his untold wealth.¹ Napoleon's decision was irrevocable, so Joséphine was forbidden to frequent Tallien.

The banishment of other women was effected in the name of decency and morality, though often due to the arbitrary whim of the "Master." He felt that he must insist upon a certain measure of decorum in official life, and therefore ceased to invite charming women who had enjoyed the hospitality of the Directoire, but whom he could not now admit, notwithstanding their secret rights to claim his gratitude.

The wife of a banker in the Chaussée d'Antin, whose reputation was more than tarnished, had succeeded in obtaining an invitation to one of Joséphine's receptions. Ever indulgent towards the weaknesses of others, the hostess acknowledged with a smile the curtsy of the frail one, who looked sublimely happy and most becoming in her beautiful raiment. Unfortunately, the keen eye of the First Consul scrutinised her before long. He walked up to her, and with his wonted brutality he exclaimed in a loud voice, "Madame, your lackeys are waiting for you downstairs, get out."

The young woman was so frightened that she fainted before reaching the door.

There was an extraordinary commotion in the *salons*. The guests promptly retired, and Joséphine was left alone to bear the brunt of her master's fury. Henceforth he ordered her to submit to him the list of all her invited guests, and from that day the Consul's wife received no one without his consent. He afforded himself every license, and rode rough-shod over every rule and every convention, but then he was a superhuman man, who had no Peers fit to judge him. His life was regulated by his own conscience, and he did not admit that other should follow in his wake. None was stricter than he in enforcing due respect for principles.

¹ Ouvrard states in his Memoirs that the real cause of Bonaparte's anger was the fact of having been refused a loan of £140,000. This, he says, was the only reason for the persecution of which he was the victim as long as the Consulate and the Empire lasted.

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A new tone prevailed at his receptions, while Barras continued to extend his affectionate hospitality to all graceful women, whether married or not. The Master of the day professed a high regard for morality, and insisted that all his guests should do likewise. He first compelled Talleyrand to marry his mistress, and then ordered him to lock her up in the house. His action caused the first ferment of that hatred which the statesman bore him with dire results, but which he ably concealed until such time as he deemed proper to act, to seek and find revenge for the many contumelies which had been imposed upon him.

When the great questions of peace and war had been discussed, a considerable amount of time was devoted to the revival of the ceremonial of the past. Republican ideas still permeated society and much prudence had to be observed, for many hesitated to assume the dress and external pomp of a defunct monarchy. The wife of the First Consul was still the Citizeness Bonaparte. His sisters had no definite position assigned to them under the Consular system, notwithstanding their keen desire to be treated as Princesses. It was soon to be satisfied, but they had to be educated and must assume manners and habits in accordance with the rank to which they aspired. It was well known that their awe-inspiring brother daily resented their familiar and vulgar doings which he could no longer tolerate. He violently reproached them with the difficulty they experienced in living up to their new status.

During those early days both he and they felt much happier at Malmaison, where they enjoyed their pleasures freely and where frank gaiety compensated them for the losses inflicted upon their vanity. The habits, furniture and the house itself were extremely simple there. The guests were untrammelled by etiquette and indulged in free games and childish distractions. There was no distinction of rank observed at Malmaison, where Talleyrand himself was treated as a private citizen. There life preserved all the charming character of in-

timacy. A very different condition of affairs obtained at Saint-Cloud, the Royal residence which had become the summer palace of the Chief Magistrate of the French Republic.

No visitors were admitted there. The host dined at a separate table, and his officers, as well as his other guests, were kept at a respectful distance from His Greatness.

The receptions at Saint-Cloud soon became as stiff and starch as those held under the old régime at Versailles.

At the Tuileries, the entourage of Mme Bonaparte assumed solemn airs. Her door had been closed to all morning visitors. The future Empress was less approachable than of yore. By order of her august master, those who would see her must seek the favour of an audience. Ladies of title accompanied her everywhere and left her as little as possible, while women of quality were pleased to join the suites of Bonaparte's mother and sisters.¹ Thus the organisation of the Court was begun in earnest.

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Society had resumed its ordinary life, pleasures and occupations.

As soon as France threw open her doors to the emigrants, the majority of them returned to the joys of hearth and home which the Directoire had denied them. Many had exhausted their means abroad and grown tired of seeking from strangers the necessary means of their support. They now forgot the bitterness of bygone days, buoyed by the hope of retrieving some fragments at least of their lost fortunes. They did not announce their return with a flourish of trumpets, but rather with prudence and a certain amount of mystery.

As a result, many of them suffered painful surprises when trying to reconstitute their original mode of life and

¹ Mme De Fontanges was attached to the person of Mme Laetitia, who was soon to become Madame-Mère. Mme de Champagny was lady-in-waiting to the Princesse Borghèse, and Mme de La Grange waited on Caroline Murat.

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to return to their past habits. So great had been the transformation of Paris since 1792, that they found it hard to recognise their streets or their own houses. They did not know the new names of those streets, or the appearance of the houses, nor did they understand the language in force, or the new modes of greeting. They were compelled to fall in with the new levelling fashions with which their late traditions had never made them acquainted. Under different laws, however, the elements which composed real society were soon banded together.

All this had been effected gradually, without ostentation, and as a result, the daily life of the nobility bore a stamp of affable but dignified simplicity.

It was an acknowledged fact that the Baronne de Montmorency, whose husband was the head of this ancient house, washed and ironed her own muslin dresses. She had dispensed with a large staff of servants and with emblazoned coaches, content to share the modest gig of her brother-in-law Thibault de Montmorency. She had not the use of it after midnight, so was compelled to don hood and galoshes and return home on foot if she happened to be out after that time.

The Marquis de Vêrac, who related these details, was not living in a very luxurious way. The Duchesse de Charost had given him the use of a servant's room which was furnished with a chair and a press bed.

The aristocracy spoke in subdued tones and awaited patiently such improvements as time might effect, in the meanwhile trying to gather the remnants of its scattered belongings, pending the day when it would regain possession of its estates by acknowledging the Empire and the Emperor.

The old groups were formed once more and the *salons* began to open their doors.

Madame de Staël was the most honoured woman in Paris, and her *salon* was the head-quarters of men of learning and intrinsic value. She was soon compelled, by the iron will of a revengeful master, to quit the beloved scene of her worldly successes and seclude herself in a

country place, buried in the winter snow. Talleyrand had ceased to frequent her house. He had done so owing to his past relations with the lady, which threatened daily to become more perilous.¹ Without approving of it, or taking sides, he witnessed the anger of Napoleon against the woman of genius, whose every work created a deep impression upon the thinking world, in spite of all the difficulties caused by the censure and notwithstanding the fact that her books were often torn to shreds or ignominiously consigned to the flames.

The élite of all the social sets attended the receptions of Mme Récamier in her Hotel of the Chaussée D'Antin, the only neutral meeting-place for members of the old and new régimes.

The younger people attended the dances of Mme de Lévis, while the uncompromising aristocrats gambled in the rooms of Mme de Luynes. Great noblemen like Talleyrand, scientists, philosophers and financiers foregathered at the house of Madame de Pastoret, while Madame Suard and Madame de Genlis held sway and vied with each other for the preponderating influence in academic circles. Men of genius paid homage to Mme de Beaumont in her apartments of the Luxembourg. Women like Mme de Staël and Mme de Saussure and such men as Fontanes, Joubert, Chênedollé, Molé and Chateaubriand, who held sway in the heart of the hostess, were surprised to meet once more, having weathered so many storms. Many repaired to the hotel of Mme de Montesson, who was the first lady to resume the social gatherings of bygone days. She had known the Court of Louis XV and also that of Louis XVI, and the elegance of yore soon blossomed again in her gilded palace. Talleyrand had fully appreciated the attractions of her house in the days of his youth and he enjoyed returning

¹ The vicious spite of Napoleon brought down Mme de Staël's friends as well as herself. Viscount de Montmorency was exiled once more for having dared to harbour her under his roof and Mme Récamier lost her fortune and peace of mind through the very same cause.

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there to quicken the recollection of happy days. He also frequented the Princesse de Vaudemont, *née* Montmorency-Nivelle. She was the wife of a Prince of Lorraine and related to the reigning families of Europe. She therefore deemed that her high status justified her in entertaining people of all shades of opinion. The survivors of the monarchy met Bonaparte's friends under her roof and no one was surprised to see M. de Calonne, the late favourite of Queen Marie-Antoinette, rubbing shoulders with Joseph Fouché, the late proscriber of Nantes, who had become the Republican friend of the Royalist aristocracy.

There was always a large attendance at the Princesse de Vaudemont's house, if it was only to hear conversational tournaments between such men as Talleyrand and Louis de Narbonne.

Talleyrand generally won the day. Narbonne produced a more refined impression of intellectual culture, but Talleyrand was more subtle, and when he chose to discard his phlegmatic mask he could carry on an easy and eloquent conversation which was very instructive, though he assumed an air of nonchalance as he delivered himself of the weightiest remarks.

People blessed with intelligence and good taste are always fond of entertaining. Talleyrand was ever hospitable. His balls and receptions were all the more fashionable as he did not entertain so composite a set as was seen at the magnificent social functions of Lucien Bonaparte.

Talleyrand never feared monotony, whether isolated in the pursuit of serious thought or compelled to remain in the company of Mme Grand alone. The variety of his occupations and the number of those who surrounded him daily prevented him from ever feeling lonely. His audiences were numerously attended by people who came to solicit favours, his advice or some discreet and useful hints. He has been depicted at these morning and afternoon interviews with an indolent but courteous air, listening patiently to his visitor whom

he accompanied back through his apartments, and finally stopping, resting his lame leg on the sofa, as he whispered the final word, the advice sought for, the decisive insinuation, the sentence which made or marred his visitor.

There were weekly receptions in the *salons* of the Foreign Office which were attended by strangers of exalted rank, by high officials and also by some friends. On those occasions, the guests' carriages filled the Rue du Bac. The staircase, bathed in light and decorated with fragrant flowers, was crowded by a continuous stream of visitors. M. de Talleyrand, in red velvet embroidered in gold, received them on the threshold of the first *salon*. Mme de Cazenove d'Arlens was an eyewitness of these receptions and has described them as follows :

“ All the Ambassadors accredited to France, all the Princes and Princesses and all the women who wished to prove their adhesion to the new régime, bowed low as they entered and left the room. The men wore their embroidered uniforms, covered with orders, ribbons, stars and medals, while the ladies were dressed in velvet, white satin, white crape, or black lace studded with diamonds.”

Diamonds had become very rare and on appearing again they seemed to shine with greater brilliancy than ever.

Mme de Talleyrand was expected to receive her guests, but had no need to speak ; she received them very well and the master of the house looked most imposing. There was a good deal of make-believe in the grave demeanour and patronising politeness which created such an impression upon his guests. His periods of silence, the enigma of which was either contempt or mystery, and the would-be indifferent tone in which he discussed the gravest matters, were all assumed mannerisms which served his hidden purpose. This had been noticed by keen-sighted women if not by men. He had artistically

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fashioned his character and countenance as those of *the* all-important individual, by adopting a series of ways and habits carefully rehearsed. They became identified with his own nature as soon as he realised that in political and social circles they gave him as much influence and prestige as if they had been natural idiosyncrasies.

The Consulate was at the zenith of its prosperity. The commercial and general prosperity seemed to prove the truth of the oft-repeated statement that "Revolutions engender law and order." The rapidity with which these happy changes were effected caused much rejoicing.

Even those least inclined to support the Dictatorship were compelled to recognise the power of organisation suddenly revealed by the Dictator, and to admit that proofs of it were forthcoming in every direction and in every official department. The true friends of liberty were no doubt apprehensive about the future and were not afraid to express their fears. Benjamin Constant denounced the premonitory symptoms of an autocratic and zealous period of domination. He did so before a full Court, but the said domination was only imposed by degrees upon the unwary nation. His excesses and abuse of power had not yet made the tyrant an object of hatred. His government was not yet christened "the tyrannical Government."

Talleyrand felt convinced that a monarchy was the form of Government best suited to France. His conviction was either due to his principles (and this is a very moot point) or to the abuses which always prevail at a Court and the advantages that can be derived from them. In a word, he felt that a monarchy offers greater opportunities for exercising one's unbridled authority than any liberal Government. He therefore urged the First Consul to resume the forms and title of that supreme power which he really wielded.

He shared his views, his interests and even his ambition, so he urged him to found his future power upon bases which might not only prove strong, but would repair the past. In return for his good advice, Napoleon gave him a free hand in foreign affairs, although he remained most jealous in the exercise of his supreme power. Thanks to this latitude, Talleyrand alone determined the new Constitution of the Germanic States. His diplomatic influence was increased tenfold as was also his private fortune, thanks to the generosity of Princes who showed him gratitude for services rendered.

Bonaparte's greatness had not yet reached that point at which he proceeded to crush all subordinates by the weight of a cumbersome etiquette and ceremonial and by that servitude resulting from passive obedience.

The Master of France had not yet become inured to the exercise of sovereignty. He was still admired and beloved, for he was calm, serene and affable. He gave occasional proofs of his despotic nature and of his innate contempt for legal formality when the Courts queried some drastic enactment of his, or dared to study it before it had obtained their sanction.¹

He gradually imposed his iron will with more and more insistence. Talleyrand was the one subordinate whom he did not overawe. He flattered the First Consul, leading him to believe that he was more in love with his personality than with his good fortune or success. In the meantime he carefully noted the rapid strides made by the future Emperor in the direction of an absolute autocracy. His wonderful foresight caused him to fear

¹ General Moreau was publicly tried at Saint-Cloud in 1804. He found a warm advocate in Judge Lecourbe, brother of the General of that name, whose pleading in behalf of the accused drove Napoleon into a state of frenzy. He bade him leave his presence and called him a prevaricating judge, not knowing the meaning of the word. Shortly afterwards he dismissed him. The chief judge, Regnier, was the main cause of his learned brother's misfortune, because he had told Napoleon that he could secure a sentence of death against the Conqueror of Hohenlinden. General Moreau was not executed.

the developments of the character which he was studying. He could not imagine for a moment that Bonaparte would ever put the brake upon the authority with which he was invested. If he ever husbanded such an illusion, it was a short-lived one.

While welcoming strangers and favouring the return of the emigrants, Bonaparte knew that there were two classes of people of whom he must get rid, the journalists and the deputies. Elderly men and women were forthwith exiled, whose only crime had been to write against the new régime.

The able diplomat grew apprehensive of recent changes that had occurred in foreign affairs. He explains in his *Memoirs* that no sooner had the Peace of Amiens been signed than Bonaparte's spirit of moderation began to forsake him. The terms of the said peace had barely been complied with when he proceeded to sow the seeds of fresh wars which were to prove his undoing after they had ruined France and Europe. He had pledged his word to restore Piémont to the King of Sardinia as soon as the Peace of Lunéville was signed. He had no sooner done so than he began to think that so far, his victories had only confirmed those of the Revolution, and that he had not yet added an acre of territory to his country. He felt the need of titles derived from annexation and aggrandisement, so as to lend greater force to his keen desire to reign. He therefore deemed fit to break his word, and to keep Piémont which had been entrusted to his keeping. Having accomplished this arbitrary act, complacently ratified by the Senate, he thought that only a silent and powerless protest would follow this violation of the right of nations, which he was pleased to call a conquest. The British Government did not see its way to encourage this illusion in the mind of Bonaparte. England was free to act now that she had no troubles abroad. She laid hands on Malta and took up arms against France, invoking the deposition of the King of Sardinia as the justification of her prompt and energetic action.

Bonaparte was entitled to some hope, however indefinite, as to the future issue of events. His flatterers and his sincere admirers thought fit to express themselves from the tribune of the Assembly in terms perfumed with incense and adorned with optimism :

“ When did the Chief of the State give greater proofs of his love for peace ?

“ If it were possible to divorce the history of the First Consul’s negotiations from that of his military exploits, the reading of the former would seem like that of the life of a demure legislator, whose one object was to secure the consolidation of permanent peace ! ”

No sooner had Monsieur de Vaublanc finished his speech, which was unanimously applauded by the Corps Législatif, than the news of a rupture between France and England became universally known. Talleyrand deplored the declaration of war, which gave a free course to endless complications.

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The Consulate was nearing its end. Its work presented an ensemble by no means devoid of greatness, but attended with a glory deeply tarnished by its pettiness, lies and cruelty. It was brought to a close by a tragic episode, the execution of the Duc d’Enghien. The responsibility of this State crime was not only laid at the door of the principal actors, but also of such witnesses of it as Prince de Talleyrand.

Although many pages have been written upon the subject, we have thought it right to inquire into the truth of these allegations.

Cadoudal, the courageous Breton who maintained such a proud and cool bearing under the fire of cross-examination, declared that the conspiracy of which he was the leader had been aided by a Prince of the Royal blood. He had no sooner uttered these rash words than the police sought the Princes of the House of Bourbon all over Europe. The Duc D’Enghien happened to be

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nearest to France just then. He was arrested and chosen as an example whose fate would provide a good lesson to all would-be Pretenders. He had lived for some time at Etteinheim, in the Duchy of Baden, in the close vicinity of the one being who possessed the secret of his heart, the sweet Princesse Charlotte de Rohan-Rochefort. He was ardent, chivalrous and the very soul of honour. He was incapable of any meanness and awaited the chance of fighting for his flag, but in the ranks of an army.¹ "I cannot serve my King in a frock coat, unless that is the uniform of La Vendée."

When he was arrested Talleyrand was accused of disclosing his whereabouts and Napoleon confirmed the accusation. Admitting the truth of this, the fact remains that such a declaration was in no way necessary. The police could have found him at any moment, thanks to its thousand ramifications and the inexhaustible source of information provided by the systematic opening of letters in "the dark room."

Talleyrand, no doubt, held the pen that wrote the note addressed to Baron d'Edelsheim, Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Grand-Duchy of Baden, and handed to him by Caulaincourt.² He signed this official document,

¹ Letter of the 24th November, 1801.

"His one idea was to be a soldier, to do, to fight for his King, even against France, and in the British ranks. On the 26th of August, 1803, he wrote to the Duc de Bourbon :

"You may be sure that Bonaparte will not forget what he is pleased to call our mad insolence, and that if the English were defeated we would find neither peace nor liberty in any part of Europe."

"The fatal name we bear condemns us to shameful inactivity," he wrote, on the 22nd of September, 1803, as his services had just been declined by Lord Hubart, the British War Minister.

² "Monsieur le Baron,

"I requested you by letter to order the arrest of the Committee of Emigrants, whose head-quarters is Offenbourg. My request was due to the knowledge acquired by the First Consul concerning the terrible plots woven against his person and against the safety of France. This knowledge was obtained by the arrest of the brigands sent to France by the British Government and by the proceedings of the many trials now on hand. The First Consul has also learnt the presence of the Duc D'Enghien and of General Dumouriez at Etteinheim. As they cannot possibly be there without the sanction of his Electoral Highness, the First Consul is grieved to find that a Prince who had given the strongest proofs of his affection towards France should grant hospitality to her most cruel enemies and allow them to



PRINCESSE CHARLOTTE DE ROHAN, WIFE OF THE DUC D'ENGHEN

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hence the irrefutable argument adduced in proof of his participation in the murder of the Duc d'Enghien. The said letter, however, was dictated by Napoleon. His private secretary, both under the Consulate and the Empire, was the Baron de Méneval, who in his Memoirs stated and underlined the fact that "*Berthier, Talleyrand, and many others never gave an order or never sent a dispatch that had not been dictated by Napoleon.*" Talleyrand, the Minister, was only the official go-between,¹ the transmitting agent, whose duty it was to inform the Grand-Duc of Baden of the important fact that a French detachment was about to invade his territory secretly and to violate its neutrality for momentous reasons of policy.

An emissary had already been sent to Etteinheim in order to watch the movements of the Duc d'Enghien. Had his daily habits been impartially observed, it could have been proved that he had ceased corresponding with his friends abroad and kept his promise to his father not to cross the frontier. He spent his days in the passionate cultivation of flowers, which he offered to the adorable Charlotte de Rohan, the faithful and tender lover, the accomplished woman, whom he had just secretly married.²

hatch such conspiracies. In this extraordinary case, the first Consul has deemed fit to order a couple of small detachments to Offenbourg and Etteinheim in order to arrest the instigators of a crime the very nature of which deprives those who have participated in it of all ordinary rights. General Caulaincourt will carry out the orders of the First Consul. You may rest assured that he will do so with all due deference to His Highness's wishes. He will have the honour to hand to your Excellency the letter which I have been instructed to write.

" (Signed) C. H. MAURICE DE TALLEYRAND."

¹ The following formal declaration, which we often find in Méneval's Memoirs, leaves no doubt upon the subject: "The First Consul dictated a letter to me, addressed to Talleyrand, in which he told him the diplomatic measures which he was to adopt. By the terms of this, he was instructed to hand General Caulaincourt a letter addressed to d'Edelsheim, Minister of the Elector of Baden, as soon as he had learned the arrest of the Duc d'Enghien" (*Méneval*, vol. i., p. 286).

² They were secretly married towards the end of 1803 by the Abbé Weinborn, the late Vicar-General of Strasbourg. The notes of the Baron de Roesch, most of which were never published, afford ample proof of this happy conclusion to their romance in exile. The Baron was the most intimate friend of the Duc d'Enghien.

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He was fond of hunting, and did much good among the poor of the neighbourhood, gnawing his bit at having to lead such a monotonous and idle life. But the military Argus sent to report by the First Consul took a very different view of things. He returned with the conviction that the Duc was carrying on an active correspondence with the militant conspirators of the Royalist Party, that he urged them to vengeance and that his absences, which often lasted weeks at a time, were devoted to tightening the threads of the plots inspired by him against the life of the First Consul. These were the impressions which he brought back. He made further revelations concerning the comings and goings of British and Bourbon agents, among whom he mentioned the restless Fauche-Borel, and Mmes de Reische and d'Etteinheim, two German ladies devoted to the Royalist cause. Bonaparte was deeply moved by the suspicious and apprehensive tenor of his report.

On the 10th March, 1804, he called together the two other Consuls, Régnier, the first Judge and Minister of Justice, Fouché and Talleyrand. He explained to them the reason why he had summoned them. He stated that criminal machinations had been put into operation against him, the elected head of the French nation. The criminal conspirators were only awaiting the arrival of a member of the Bourbon family, who was not the Duc de Berry as was supposed, but the Duc d'Enghien, the last of the Condés. This Prince meant to take his life and it was certain that he would use every means to do so. In the face of ample evidence of what he adduced, was not he, Bonaparte, entitled to anticipate this attempt by immediate reprisals and to frustrate the homicidal plans fomented against him? Was he not justified in arresting the Prince anyhow and anywhere? The question he submitted brooked no answer and he sought the opinion of the members of his Council.

Much confusion ensued among them. Their answers were not forthcoming without considerable hesitation on their part. At last Fouché addressed his colleagues.

He was bound hand and foot to the First Consul and insidiously proceeded to weave apparent proofs together in order to justify the committal of a daring deed which would effectively kill the hydras of conspiracy. He promised (though well aware of the illusory nature of such a promise) that if the case was not made out against the Prince, he would be set at liberty, and that those who had committed the mistake should have to offer him reparation. Cambacérès expressed very different views. He did not believe the evidence brought against the descendant of one of the illustrious families of France. On the contrary, he was convinced that the Duc had given up all idea of aggression. He had even heard that he had contemptuously hunted away a man who had come to him offering to kill the First Consul.

The Council heard the reading of the long memorandum written by the High Judge upon the Pichegru conspiracy in Central France. Talleyrand wound up the proceedings by a long exposition of the avowed or hidden doings of Anglo-Royalist agents. He mentioned the whereabouts of every member of the Royal Family, including the Duc d'Enghien. He did so, not to incite the authorities to arrest the young Prince, but simply to afford them accurate information. He added that every precaution should be taken for the safety of the First Consul and the peace of the Empire. (Cambacérès told Madame du Cayla that he pronounced the word "Empire" with such affectation that Bonaparte smiled most pleasantly.) As was his wont, Talleyrand argued the matter from a purely diplomatic point of view. Having remarked that those surrounding the Duc d'Enghien might very well be conspiring without his knowledge, the more so as people in his position were usually kept in ignorance of what was being done in their name, he concluded that to arrest him upon neutral ground would be an open violation of common rights. European Powers would resent this loudly and it would be unwise to expose France to the results of such an act. He added that it was much wiser to wait until the Prince committed

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the imprudence of returning to France for the second time, notwithstanding the standing order for his expulsion. A wilful defiance of the law on his part would be a legitimate motive for his arrest.

Talleyrand hoped that the First Consul would postpone the execution of this project and thus safeguard French interests. Moreover, the astute Minister had fully decided that such an opportunity of arresting the Duc would not present itself, inasmuch as he would advise Princess Charlotte d'Enghien to defend her husband against his own rashness.

The Third Consul shared the views of Cambacérès. Fouché alone had expressed the secret views of Bonaparte, who had only consulted the other dignitaries for the sake of appearances. He was incensed by their resistance and exclaimed:—

“ You have all become very sparing of the Bourbon blood.”

As he spoke these words, he cast such a wicked glance at his colleagues that they very nearly resigned.

The opinion of Senator Fouché was the only one that commended itself to him because it favoured the course of action which he had already adopted.

Acting upon his order, a detachment of troops commanded by General Ordener was to cross the Rhine that night, to reach Etteinheim and seize the person of the Duc d'Enghien. His orders were obeyed. The Prince had strenuously refused to fly from danger, notwithstanding the warnings of Comte de Launans, of General Frion and the urgent request of Princesse Charlotte.

On the 15th March, 1804, three hundred Dragoons and Gendarmes, commanded by two Generals and two Colonels, surrounded his house. The doors were stove in, the premises ransacked and the Duc snatched from his bed. He was led from the castle to a mill near by and here placed on board a boat, landed at Rheinau and brought on foot to Pfofsheim. Here he was thrown into a carriage and swiftly driven to Strasbourg, where he

arrived at five in the evening. He was forthwith imprisoned in the citadel.

On Sunday the 18th he was rudely awakened at one in the morning and sent to Vincennes, where he arrived on the 20th, completely exhausted by hunger and fatigue and utterly surprised at the violence displayed against him. He little knew that he had but a few hours to live.

It is useless to recall the heartless and deliberate action of Bonaparte, notwithstanding the entreaties of Joséphine and the earnest prayers addressed to him by many others. It was similar State reasons, cruel, inhuman and premeditated, that had sent Louis XVI to the scaffold.

“He is guilty, because he is a King,” was the only argument adduced at the convention by Manuel, who did not, however, vote for his execution. Danton stated brutally, “We do not want to judge a King, we want to kill him.”

Moved by the same iniquitous spirit, Saint-Just affirmed that the King should be judged as an enemy, not as a man. Bonaparte was eager to seize the Crown and to disconcert the Royalist conspirators by sheer force while supporting his own power by the accessory approval of the Revolutionary leaders, who would acknowledge him as one of themselves¹ if he sacrificed the life of a Bourbon Prince for the sake of example.

The Judges of his Ardent Chamber soon accomplished their task. It would be truer to say there were no Judges. Réal, who had been appointed as such, conveniently forgot the time of the trial, which was conducted by court martial only, presided over by General Hulin. All this was naturally prearranged. Réal had forgotten, Réal had slept during that terrible night of the 20-21st of March. Savary was not so particular, for he knew that the Duke's grave was dug before he was tried and sentenced.

¹ One of them had said to him, “Prove to us that you aspire to Royalty with the view only of preserving it, and we will fall at your feet as your faithful servants.”

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When the trial was over, the Prince conversed freely with Noirot, the Lieutenant on duty and questioned him about his war services and the circumstances under which he had joined the Army. Suddenly the door of the room was opened by Harel, the Governor of the Castle, who carried a lantern in his hand and was accompanied by a sergeant. He invited the Duc d'Enghien to follow him. When the last gate was reached, the party found itself at the foot of the Governor's tower, close to the Queen's pavilion, in the humid trenches of the dungeon. The Prince was face to face with the firing-party. Pelé, the Adjutant-General, directed the rays of his bull's-eye towards the condemned man. The sentence of death was read out to him and a few minutes' respite were granted and spent by him in silent prayer. As he rose, the Gendarmes fired, and he fell riddled with bullets.

✓ Savary, who had strenuously opposed the appeal on behalf of the prisoner, which the court martial itself had suggested, directed the execution from the top of the ramparts.

As soon as this political murder became known, Blanc-d'Hauterive and Brisson, both high officials under Talleyrand, rushed into his study to inform him of what had occurred. "It is impossible to continue serving such a man!" they exclaimed, but the Minister replied in the chilliest tone possible :

✓ "Such matters concern him alone, surely, and cannot be judged by you or me." He kept his own impressions to himself. As his two subordinates left his presence, the one said to the other, "This dreadful deed will focus public opinion upon the Bourbons and will surely help their cause."

✓ Did Talleyrand ever advise this murder, or ever approve of it? Did his cowardly complacency tend to the undoing of the Prince? Many pens have said so and Chancellor Pasquier has asserted the fact. Both his clear statement and the lucid version of the occurrence provided by Savary would go to prove that Bonaparte wished to give complete effect to his intentions, and that in this he met

with Talleyrand's approval;¹ that it was Caulaincourt who urged him, almost unawares, to arrest the Duc d'Enghien, that Murat ordered the trial, and that the execution was carried out by the future Duc de Rovigo. Napoleon himself endeavoured to throw upon Talleyrand the responsibility of an act which he never denied, and for which he never expressed the slightest regret.

Both Fouché and the Minister for Foreign Affairs have strenuously denied all participation in the matter, and the proofs of his innocence put forward by the latter are much more convincing than those submitted by the late member of the Convention. Madame de Rémusat has related in her souvenirs the conversations of Talleyrand upon this point. He stated to her that Bonaparte had briefly informed him of the arrest of the Duc d'Enghien and of the decision he had come to. "The tiger had smelt blood." Talleyrand remained silent, knowing full well that no words of his could change Napoleon's views or alter his determination. Those who have judged him most severely said that he should have resigned if he disapproved of this cruel measure.

To such, he calmly replied: "If Bonaparte has been guilty of a crime as you state, that is no reason why I should be guilty of a stupid action."²

It would have been stupid indeed to resign without any compensation save the satisfaction of his own conscience, in exchange for the many years of power, honour and glory which he had enjoyed, as well as fame and fortune. He preferred to remain silent. He closed both eyes and

¹ "To commit a crime is one matter, but to plead for a criminal is a very different thing. In the very worst of cases, the counsel has never been identified with his client's deed" (Duc de Broglie: *The Trial and Execution of the Duc d'Enghien*, 1880, p. 30).

² "The violent and unexplained death of Pichegru and the methods used to secure the condemnation of Moreau, could be excused on political grounds. The murder of the Duc d'Enghien could neither be excused nor forgiven and it never has been. It was committed with the sole object of closing up the ranks of, and thereby imparting confidence to, those who, owing to the death of Louis XVI, feared every power that did not emanate from themselves. When Bonaparte realised that his act could meet with no forgiveness, he was compelled to boast of it" (Talleyrand's Memoirs).

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lips, and buried his opinion, which he meant to express some day, both fully and unsparingly.

Two days after the murder he gave a great ball as though nothing had occurred. This action was deemed by far too politic and anything but generous.

The Empire was founded a few days later, when Bonaparte decided to use the hereditary monarchy as a shield against all dangers. His action was dictated by the landing in Brittany of a handful of emigrants who had come over in an English ship. This plot enabled the First Consul to indict as its accomplices, Dumouriez, Pichegru and Moreau, his three military rivals. He was aided, moreover, by the series of conspiracies which compelled Talleyrand to intervene in order to save the life of Polignac and determined the awful holocaust of Cadoudal and his accomplices, who fell with scores of others. The flood-gates of Napoleon's anger and spirit of revenge were thrown open and rivers of blood flowed in consequence.¹

¹ So much blood had not flowed in one day since the scaffold of the Terreur had been dismantled.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ZENITH OF NAPOLEON'S POWER IS NEAR AT HAND

Talleyrand's exalted position in the years 1804-1805—His harmonious and intimate relations with the Emperor—Their work in common—Bonaparte's growing ambition—The French Empire and the German War—Talleyrand's departure for Strasbourg—His journey to Vienna after the victory—His short residence at the Château de Schönbrunn—Diplomatic overtures—Napoleon rejects Talleyrand's advice to spare Austria and to beware of the wiles of Russian diplomacy—The diplomat's impressions on the field of battle at Austerlitz—Napoleon reads his Paris correspondence on the day of his triumph—The difficulties which Talleyrand had to overcome before obtaining the treaty of peace at Presbourg—From Presbourg to Tilsitt—Talleyrand compelled to follow the Emperor to Berlin and to Poland—A halt at Warsaw before the holocausts of Eylau and Friedland—Balls and entertainments given during the rainy season—A ball at the house of Prince de Bénévent—Hostilities are resumed—Talleyrand gradually dissociates himself from the interests and plans of Napoleon—His reason for doing so—The Tilsitt illusions—The Emperor's secret—Napoleon, Talleyrand, and the Queen of Prussia—Return to France—Napoleon deprives Prince de Bénévent of the portfolio of Foreign Affairs and appoints him Vice-Grand-Elector—The consequences of this change—Talleyrand is consoled for this semi-disgrace by his additional titles and increased wealth.

DURING five years, Talleyrand had furthered the plans of the Consul and the Emperor without always approving of them. He had ably flattered him and rendered signal services as a diplomat. Napoleon now wished to reward the courtier while preserving the services of the Minister. He appointed him Lord High Chamberlain, with a salary of 100,000 francs.

The Earl-Marshal and the Master of the Horse received the same emoluments.

The importance of his functions was on a par with the splendour of the new Monarchy. He wielded supreme authority in all foreign affairs, and it was not contested

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by Napoleon. Europe knew him and admired him as a perfect courtier and a remarkable diplomat. It was admitted that he had no political morality, but he was also credited with avoiding extremes. His conservative opinions were appreciated by the Chanceries as much as the courtesy of his relations and the refinement of his language. It has been justly said that Napoleon was far too imperative and absolute ever to handle difficult and prolonged business with any subtlety or success. He did not think he should lose his time in justifying his decisions by arguments, whether long or short. The only reason which he ever invoked for acting as he did was that adduced by the potentate in the fable :

“ I act thus, taking my share and yours and his and theirs, because I am the Lion.”

Talleyrand's art enabled him to attenuate and shape the sayings of the Emperor and to achieve results along the paths of meek persuasion, instead of attempting to do so over the rough roads of despotic insistence.

He always started slowly, prepared the ground beforehand and carefully studied all the points of the problem which he had to solve. As he gave more precise shape to his action, he proceeded more rapidly and never relented in his efforts before obtaining his object. It was thus that he skilfully effected the formation of the League of the Rhine, and, with the help of the Duc de Dalberg, he laid the foundation of that Confederation in which Bavaria, Baden and Württemberg became the corner-stones of the Germanic Empire.

He conversed with the Emperor on every event concerning his Department. Napoleon read the dispatches which he handed to him, pronounced his judgment and declared his intentions in valuable and explicit terms. Talleyrand let him talk without interrupting him, affecting to listen attentively. He did not express his own ideas unless requested to do so, and then only answered in monosyllables. This was why Baron de Méneval, Napoleon's private secretary, thought that the Minister's

prudence was excessive, or that he waited to elicit his master's views before expressing his own.¹

It sometimes happened that Napoleon was suddenly called away to give audience to some exalted visitor. In such cases he would say to his Minister: "You know exactly what I want. Please commit my wishes to paper before I return." The letter or document was often unwritten when he came back, for Talleyrand knew how suddenly the Emperor changed his mind. Whether dealing with important or minor affairs, he never acted hurriedly. His method was always the same and he resorted to the same weapons, patience and secrecy. His slow and deliberate actions were misinterpreted by Méneval, who thought him afflicted with intellectual inertia. It frequently happened that he did not even wet his pen during the Emperor's temporary absence. Napoleon would express no surprise at this, but if he adhered to his idea and wished it realised, he would gather up the papers on the table, peruse them hastily and proceed to dictate abundant matter to his Secretary or to his Minister. It was then impossible to avoid transmitting his plans and decisions to their respective quarters. Talleyrand would proceed to his apartments and annotate the letter or dispatch with marginal remarks. He then handed it to the worthy and laborious Hauterive, who had a profound knowledge of the Emperor's methods and ways of thinking.

The views of Napoleon and Talleyrand, however opposed in principle, were eventually reconciled in harmonious success. Notwithstanding his cold and calculating methods, Talleyrand could not always steel himself against the vivacious and intoxicating influence of such a giant. Though he did not inspire absolute confidence to the master who utilised his talents while doubting his fidelity, he received from him proofs of flattering attention, much akin to sympathy.

¹ Bonaparte was always a past master in the art of dissimulation. His personal prestige was unrivalled, save

¹ Méneval's *Souvenirs*, vol. ii., p. 279.

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when he became inordinately swollen by his miraculous success, and he possessed a power of seduction which few could resist. He had still preserved at that time a certain amount of frankness and honesty, which found expression in his speech, but which was soon to vanish for ever.

In their frequent conversations Napoleon and his Ministers surveyed the situation of the day or discussed vast ideas and future enterprises. When they had concluded their business, their conversation assumed a more familiar tone, and dealt with past events or matters that had occurred in Court circles. Familiarity often gave way to intimacy. One day the Emperor complained of the monotony of his domestic happiness. He said he felt he must indulge in a pleasant escapade. Complying with his desire, Talleyrand suggested the choice of a temporary Sultana, for which Napoleon was extremely grateful. As long as the pleasant incident lasted, he kept his Minister informed of the pleasure it afforded him. On another occasion, Napoleon frankly explained to his subordinate his real feelings towards some of his intimate friends, such as Berthier the future Prince de Wagram, his inseparable Chief of the Staff.

“ I cannot really understand the origin of the relations existing between Berthier and myself ; they seem to be those of friendship. Yet I do not waste my time on useless sentiment and Berthier is so commonplace that I fail to see why I should care for him. Still, I feel at heart that I have a certain leaning towards him, when nothing occurs to change it.”

“ Do you know why you care for him ? ” said Talleyrand. “ It is because he believes in you.”

The man who spoke these words was not possessed of such a believing nature, but until then there had been no serious shock, no avowedly inimical opposition in his relations with the Emperor.

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Talleyrand was studying the best means of pacifying the Continent by permanent treaties, while Napoleon was

exciting a thirst for reprisals among the defeated nations who smarted under the lash of the exactions which quickly followed upon his victories. France and Europe were unfortunately swept away in a whirlwind and the diplomat could only initiate what he had not time to pursue, much less to achieve.

In 1805 he endeavoured to allay the susceptibilities of Western Europe by the prudence of his calculations. His plans failed because the jealous anxiety of the world was stimulated once more by the Emperor's action in assuming the title of King of Italy, thereby giving rise to the conviction that he meant to annex the whole peninsula. He had already taken Genoa and given the principality of Lucques to his sister Eliza. Talleyrand took part in the triumphant journey through Italy. He was present at the ovations and the festivities in Genoa. He was among the high dignitaries who surrounded Napoleon when this modern Charlemagne was crowned in the Cathedral of Milan,¹ and when placing the iron crown on his head, he pronounced the ancient formula, "*Il cielo me la diede, guai a chi la toccherà!*"²

Those present shuddered with emotion and enthusiasm, while the cool and collected Minister foresaw that a fresh war with the neighbouring country would inevitably result from this superb gesture, and that before long troops would be drawn up on the banks of the Adige. He was right. Before many days had elapsed the Russians and Austrians were up in arms. Markow, the Russian Ambassador, who had left Paris in 1803 filled with hostile resentment, and d'Oubril, the Chargé d'Affaires, had both forwarded to Talleyrand a list of formal claims and informed him of the aggressive intentions of the Czar if the evacuation of Hanover, Saxony and Italy was further postponed.

The Austrians were most eager combatants and rushed to meet defeat. They crossed the Inn, marched through

¹ 21st July, 1804.

² "Heaven has given it to me, and woe be to him who dares touch it."

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Bavaria and occupied the centre of Souabia. They very nearly reached the banks of the Rhine, thinking that the Emperor was still organising his camp at Boulogne. The great army that was to meet them was quickly moved from this maritime town to the eastern frontier. Austria had hoped that by effecting a rapid march through Bavaria and Wurtemberg she could induce these two principalities to join the German Army against Napoleon. Talleyrand's diplomacy, together with his skilful and vague promises, prevented this coalition, Prussia remained neutral. As soon as operations had begun, he was ordered to accompany the Emperor to Strasbourg within easy reach of head-quarters, where he could join him at a moment's notice.

Following the dictates of her puerile mind, the Empress Joséphine had obtained permission to take part in this military expedition, which she fondly looked upon as a pleasure trip. She had taken up her abode in the old city of Alsace, surrounded by her chamberlains and her ladies-in-waiting. She meant to while away happy hours there, convinced that the Emperor's troops would terminate the campaign almost as soon as it had begun.

In the meantime an accident occurred which Talleyrand witnessed and afterwards related. It happened after the somewhat intimate farewell between Joséphine and Bonaparte.

On the day of his departure from Strasbourg, the Emperor left the table at which Talleyrand was seated with him, and repaired alone to Joséphine's apartments. He returned after a few minutes and found his Minister awaiting him in the drawing-room. Napoleon seized him by the arm and led him towards his own room, where the Comte de Rémusat, the Lord Chamberlain, had already come for his master's orders. No sooner had Napoleon reached his apartment than he was seized with a fit of epilepsy, a malady from which he suffered in his early youth. As he fell backwards he exclaimed, "Close the doors." He was apparently choking. Talleyrand undid his tie, while Rémusat gave him water.

When he came to he burst into a flood of tears and sobbed with all his might. He soon recovered his equanimity, however, and straightening himself, resumed his usual appearance and embraced his wife. Having shaken hands with Talleyrand, he said to Rémusat: "The carriages have arrived, so pray tell the gentlemen of my staff that I am ready."

Half an hour later he was on the road to Carlsruhe. On his arrival at Stuttgart he sent news to Talleyrand, to whom he addressed a second letter the same day, concluding with these words: "Mack¹ is marching as if I myself were leading him. I shall trap him at Ulm, where he will be caught like a rat."

The Russian columns endeavoured in vain to join the waning Austrian troops. Their forced marches were useless. Ulm and its powerful garrison had capitulated. Napoleon's victories came in quick succession and in the order in which their names occurred upon the map he had drawn up for the campaign. French regiments occupied Vienna and Napoleon had taken up his quarters in the Palace of Schönbrunn, whence he dispatched his letters from the apartments of Marie-Thérèse.

He informed Talleyrand of the conditions which he meant to impose upon Austria and of the territory he meant to exact from her. This he did on the morrow of Ulm, before arriving in Vienna. The Minister had remained faithful to his system of reasonable compensations, but was unable to convince a conqueror opposed to sharing with anyone. He tried to prove to Napoleon that it was not advisable to drain every drop of Austria's blood, but more politic to give her with one hand what he took from her with the other, this being the surest way of winning her over as a permanent ally. He repeated this advice when he joined his master at Munich and again at Vienna, but in each case he was doomed to fail.

His interviews at Schönbrunn were cut short, for the army soon resumed its onward march. Napoleon yearned

¹ The Austrian Commander-in-chief.

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to attack and conquer the Russians, so that he might soon call them allies and, with or without their help, open up the road to that fascinating East which he wished to reach. What he had seen of it in Egypt had kindled his desire to subject it all to his rule.

He left Talleyrand at Schönbrunn with Maret, the State Secretary, who he knew was not a friend of his Minister for Foreign Affairs. The prospect of this *tête-à-tête* did not rejoice either statesman. They viewed men and events from opposite angles, and did not profess the same feelings towards the Emperor whom Maret obeyed with idolatrous submission which he exhibited on every occasion. What could these two men have to say in common in the deserted Palace of Schönbrunn? They resided there on the coldest terms till Rémusat somewhat distended their strained relations. He had been sent from Paris to Vienna in charge of the Imperial ornaments and the crown jewels. Talleyrand greeted him warmly, for he felt real sympathy towards him and was requited by his sincere attachment. He was the more welcome as his presence dispelled the grey gloominess of Schönbrunn.

The Comte de Rémusat did not at first show much friendship towards the high dignitary with whom he was brought into immediate contact by his duties at Court. Napoleon had advised him to maintain an attitude of reserve, if not of suspicion, for it did not suit his purposes that these two high officials should become too intimate. It amused and distracted the Master to sow the seeds of discord among those of his followers whose feelings were the same and who therefore might become too intimate. All those who served him in any capacity whatsoever had to obey his law and no other. Gradually, however, the Lord High Chamberlain and the First Chamberlain became much more friendly owing to the clever and charming intervention of Madame de Rémusat. When the Emperor heard this, he hastened to warn Rémusat that he was travelling on the wrong road. "Beware," said he in a benevolent tone that ill became him, "lest M. de

Talleyrand's advances to you should be dictated by his desire to harm you."

The modest and simple Rémusat wondered why M. de Talleyrand should wish to harm him, and he experienced some difficulty in overcoming this apprehension, which eventually disappeared. He yielded to the charming grace and affability which Talleyrand could so well assume and their relations became more cordial and frequent. Notwithstanding the clever way in which their Master had endeavoured to set them at each other's throats, Rémusat's soul harboured but a shred of doubt, when he wrote the following letter to his wife :

" MILAN, 7th May, 1805.

" M. de Talleyrand has been here a week, and it depends upon me alone to consider him my best friend. He speaks as such. I often go to his house ; he links my arm wherever he finds me, whispers in my ear for two and three hours at a time and imparts to me many confidences. He takes an interest in my future and wishes me to be placed upon a different footing than that of other Chamberlains. Tell me, dear friend, if I have once more come into favour, or if you think that this wily man is trying to steal a march upon me."

The above lines show that he was not yet sure of his ground, but his vague suspicions were quite allayed during the journey in Germany. At Strasbourg Talleyrand became convinced of Rémusat's loyal and straightforward character and of the soundness of his judgment. His friendship towards him had taken deep root and was further increased at Schönbrunn. Though usually guarded in his speech, he spoke freely to Rémusat upon political questions and imparted to him the fears which were born of the victories of the French Army, the subsequent intoxication of the Emperor and his Generals, the grievous mistakes and the thousand difficulties which would ensue if the Emperor did not succeed in curbing and moderating his turbulent, despotic nature. Rémusat was much flattered at being made the recipient of these confidences.

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He shared the fears of Talleyrand, and often told his charming wife how much he was enabled to understand and to discover, owing to his friendship with him, "a friendship," he added, "which had afforded the most powerful food for his intelligence and thoughts."

The lady was greatly impressed and began to take much interest in this man of superior merit, whose society attenuated the hardships of exile which weighed so heavily upon her husband.

When Talleyrand was entrusted with the preliminary negotiations in which Stadion and Giulay took part, he hoped that his moderate counsels would prevail.

Austria was called upon to hand over her German, Swiss, and Italian possessions, and in exchange he proposed to indemnify her in the near East by giving her Moldachia, Valachia, and Bessarabia, thus enabling her to found a great Danubian State. This State would constitute a bulwark for Europe against the Russians. In his opinion, before Austerlitz had been fought and won, this was the true solution of the wars which had lasted for many years and which only ceased for a short period so that they might be resumed with greater violence than ever.

Modern history affords many proofs of the prudence and worth of his far-seeing judgment. The Chanceries of Europe have a vivid recollection of the able way in which the ideas of Talleyrand were endorsed by Bismarck at the Berlin Congress. He converted a hostile Power into a sure and faithful ally, thus strengthening his victory while consoling Austria for the loss of Sadowa. He diverted her from Germany, her former possession, and encouraged her in the East, where he supported her to his utmost. He was thus able to effect the union of the central Powers and to oppose it as a strong barrier to Russian greed for expansion.

By the evolution of this programme which Austria was not ready to accept, Talleyrand foresaw that the Habsbourgs might change the zone of their ambitions and avoid cause of perilous friction between themselves and a Napoleonic Empire. They would thus have ceased to be

permanent adversaries and would have become staunch allies, whose interest it was to repel the Russian invasion. This scheme might have secured permanent peace for Western Europe.

Had this plan succeeded, Napoleon would have had but one adversary to conquer or to win over, England to wit. Such were the views of the French diplomat, but it is not quite certain that Austria would have forsaken her love for those beautiful Italian possessions in order to adopt another course. The experiment was not attempted. While Napoleon eagerly prosecuted the defeat of Alexander's troops, he persisted in the opposite conception of sharing the East with Russia. Talleyrand implored of him to consider most carefully the reasons and arguments which he adduced.¹

"I beseech of Your Majesty to read over once more the project which I had the honour to forward from Strasbourg. Austria is falling to pieces as a result of her repeated defeats, and a foreseeing, prudent policy should, I submit, dictate an alliance with her which would give her fresh confidence and enable us to use her as a barrier against barbarian and Russian alike."

His advice was heard, but not accepted. Napoleon had other hopes and other visions. Europe did not suffice him now, for he could effect nothing new, nothing extraordinary in that part of the world. The East alone afforded him a vast field of enterprise. On the eve of Austerlitz he thus expressed his regret at having missed his opportunity in 1799 and his keen desire to attempt a gigantic task :

"If I had seized Saint-John of Acre, I should have won a battle with pregnant results, instead of securing a victory in Moravia. I should have been crowned Emperor of the East and have returned to Paris by way of Constantinople."²

¹ Talleyrand's letter to Napoleon, 25th December, 1805.

² This was a magnificent illusion, which could only subsist in words, for apart from Saint John of Acre the Egyptian campaign was doomed. Bonaparte knew it well, when, on the eve of his victory at Aboukir, he sent a woeful and distressing appeal for help to Paris.

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When indulging in his dreams of glorious expansion, he paid little heed to weighty considerations based upon reason and stability.

He was prepared to act the part of a generous conqueror if Austria would only afford him an opportunity to effect an understanding with those same Russians whom he was about to mow down with his heavy guns. Had Francis and the Tzar given him a free road towards the Land of Light, he would have asked for nothing more as the price incurred by them, thanks to the dazzling triumphs which awaited him in the near future. We must not forget that at this particular moment he was about to fight his great and decisive battle against the Allies, a battle which cost them thousands and thousands of lives.

The Russian head-quarters were in a state of frenzied excitement. The great battles fought by Koutouzoff and by Bagration had kindled great hopes. The successive defeats of the Austrians were due to the imprudence of their leaders. Such at least was the opinion of the Russians who hated and despised Bonaparte, the little Corsican.

The smallest outpost success, a prudent move premeditated by Napoleon, or the arrival of Savary bearing a flag of truce, caused them to hail victory with rapturous applause. Dolgorouki said to his soldiery: "Do not fail to observe the road by which the French will retreat."

The young Emperor Alexander was still at Olmütz and had not yet witnessed a battle. Acting against the advice of the Austrians and of the King of Prussia, he hurled his heavy battalions against the enemy, just to see the effect produced.

This was Austerlitz, which proved most disastrous to himself and to Francis, while covering Napoleon with fresh glory. Alexander's action caused the death of thousands, while the field of battle was strewn by thousands and thousands of wounded, whose lives and sufferings might have been spared and the sacrifice of whom could have served no purpose. When the battle was fought, one of the conquered Sovereigns repaired to the

Conqueror's tent. Napoleon granted him the interview he had asked for, but was not pleased at its result.

"This man," he said, "has made me commit a grievous error. I could have taken the whole of the Russian and Austrian armies at that moment, but I consoled myself with the thought that fewer tears would be spilt if I refrained from doing so."

Talleyrand forthwith offered to repair the mistake which had been made, but Napoleon had decided not to yield an inch to Austria in the Far East and to treat upon this question with Russia, an ally as powerful in victory as in defeat, owing to her geographical position and unknown possibilities.

On the morrow of Austerlitz Talleyrand spent two long hours on the cold battlefield in the company of Marshal Lannes, who on the eve had performed prodigies of valour and now shed copious tears as he gazed upon the distorted features of the dead and witnessed the awful sufferings of the wounded men of different nationalities.

He said to Talleyrand: "I cannot witness this sight any longer, unless you help me to slay some of these wretched Jews, who, like jackals, are robbing the moribund and the dead." He almost fainted at the ghastly sight. It was General Lannes who said to Talleyrand, "that the battle of Austerlitz had sharpened the pen of diplomacy with the blade of a sword." He was one of that group of Republican heroes which included Marceau, Hoche, and Kléber. One and all were covered with glory, but saddened by the fact that their hard-earned laurels were stained with so much blood.

Napoleon forthwith instructed Talleyrand to read out to him the voluminous correspondence forwarded from Paris and the contents of the mysterious portfolio of the Comte de La Valette, which included the private letters unsealed and opened in the "dark room."¹

The Chief of the State has taken up his quarters in the house belonging to Prince Kaunitz. The reading of the

¹ The working of the "dark room" was fully explained by Napoleon himself at Saint-Helena.

correspondence took place in the Prince's room, which was hung with the flags that had just been snatched from his Sovereign's troops. The letters of the Foreign Ambassadors in Paris were read first, but this occupied very little time, inasmuch as Talleyrand knew beforehand what they contained. Then followed a number of police denunciations, which always proved interesting to the Emperor's inquisitorial mind.

The most important of these was penned by Madame Genlis, an incorrigible writer, who scribbled as much as Madame de Bouillé. She was the late governess to the Orléans Princes. The letter contained an analysis of the existing frame of mind in Paris, of the strong opposition which was being fomented in the Faubourg-Saint-Germain and of the offensive sayings overheard by her in certain aristocratic circles. She mentioned the names of five or six families, asserting that they would never rally to the cause of the Imperial Government.

Napoleon listened intently to these details. As Talleyrand proceeded, the Emperor betrayed visible signs of anger, and finally burst into a paroxysm of rage.

"So the gentlemen of the Faubourg-Saint-Germain think they can master me? We shall soon see."

As soon as this portion of his labours was terminated, he proceeded to discuss the negotiations with Austria, which began at Brünn, in Moravia, and finished at Presbourg.

Talleyrand was summoned to head-quarters, where all seemed to be in a state of fever. The victorious generals were intoxicated by their success and earnestly prayed that the war might be continued. They considered it would be high time to suspend military operations when Austria had been finally crushed. Talleyrand alone pleaded for immediate peace, at the risk of incurring the displeasure of the Field-Marshal and the superior officers who surrounded the Emperor.

Frederick William III was induced by Napoleon to sign a deplorable treaty, in consequence of which Prussia fought England against her own wish and her own interests. Talleyrand found it easier to discuss

matters with General Giulay and Prince Jean Lichtenstein, the Austrian plenipotentiaries, in the calm atmosphere of Presbourg, away from the feverish vicinity of the Emperor. He had received strict instructions to impose harsh conditions upon Austria. He could not modify the spirit of them, but was free to draw them up in such terms as he chose. He therefore endeavoured to attenuate such clauses as that of the war indemnity and to prevent, in the case of other clauses, the possibility of false and arbitrary interpretations.

His task was an arduous one. Napoleon had promised to surrender Tyrol to Francis II. He had no sooner done so than he changed his mind and without any warning to Talleyrand he decided not to carry out the engagement into which he had entered verbally. The diplomat, deprived of full instructions, was compelled to retrace his steps, to resume the discussion of peace or war and to grant a hearing to the impatient requests of the generals, who were not yet satiated with that glory whose weight was soon to prove too heavy for them.

Having lost many precious hours in vainly attempting to overcome the obstinacy of the Conqueror, he returned to Presbourg and concluded his arduous work. He did not satisfy the Emperor who reproached him with having obtained too small a price for a peace dictated on the field of battle and written upon a drum, which proved the most humiliating peace that Austria ever accepted. Napoleon wrote to him :

“The treaty which you concluded in my behalf at Presbourg has thwarted me considerably.”

When their friendship had ceased, the Emperor often discussed this treaty and accused the negotiator of having snatched from him the fruits of victory by reassuring the enemy and sparing him to such an extent as to make a second Austrian campaign unavoidable. Talleyrand himself had no illusions concerning the fragile and uncertain nature of the convention signed on the 25th of December, 1805, which was criticised as follows by the Prussian Minister in Vienna :

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“The treaty of Presbourg contains all the germs of another war.”

It was yet possible to conjure the harm that had been done. The peace of Europe could have been secured for a long time by the adoption of one of two policies. That of Talleyrand embodied an alliance with Austria, based upon the common advantages to be reaped in the East, while Metternich's predicated the unfettered freedom of France in all matters concerning the East, but insisted upon the right of Austria, Prussia and Russia to maintain the integrity of the Ottoman Empire.

Napoleon could not accept this sacrifice, so he pursued his course eastwards, regardless of all advice. The conquest of the East was the secret motive, the one goal of his whole policy of territorial extension.

War to the death was the inevitable result of all these counter-shocks and it could only terminate by the final ruin and annihilation of one of the two parties in the conflict.

Talleyrand had joined the Court, convinced of his ability to act or to react. Three months later he learnt that Fouché had received the ducal title of Otrante, and Macdonald that of Tarente, while Bernadotte was given the principality of Ponte-Corvo. He himself had been created Prince of Bénévent. Napoleon had summarily disposed of the Crown of Naples and issued a decree ordering Ferdinand IV to hand over this jewel to Joseph Bonaparte, his brother. Talleyrand received his Prince's coat-of-arms without the slightest emotion. He thanked those who complimented him upon his new title, but asked them to congratulate Madame de Talleyrand and not himself, saying: “Ladies are always pleased to become Princesses.” He bore the title of Prince with fitting dignity, now that the princely coronet surmounted the escutcheon of the Chalais. He used the title in all official deeds and dispatches, but performed no other formalities connected with this Roman appanage. He did not deny or belittle its historical value, but considered that that of Talleyrand-Périgord was equal. When he

was at Warsaw, the following year, Baron de Gagern constantly addressed him as "Your Highness." He asked him not to do so, but simply to call him M. de Talleyrand, adding, "My name conveys less than the title of Highness and perhaps a great deal more."

The Chanceries of Europe were absorbed by projects of alliances and counter-alliances. They contradicted one another in turn, in accordance with the requirements of common greed and mutual fear. They began negotiations, concluded them, then renounced them, as Alexander had just done in the case of conventions which his agent, d'Oubril, had signed in Paris on the 26th of May, 1806.

The politicians of Europe carefully studied the map upon which they made theoretical changes, fondly hoping to convert them into tangible realities. They mistrusted one another, but combined their common efforts against the upstart Sovereign who had risen from the crowd and whose weird pleasure it was to put the world into a condition of topsy-turveydom.

Alexander I was just as ambitious as Napoleon, and just as prone to gainsay his word or disown his signature. He feared lest the French Emperor might eventually follow Talleyrand's advice and drag Austria in his wake, compelling her to follow him in the wild race for future conquests. Austria also feared lest the Russian and French Emperors might agree upon the dismemberment of the East and divide it between themselves only.

A German statesman had just said, "It is high time to attend to the ruined condition of Turkey and to the guarantees which Austria will seek in the Balkans."

"My one desire is to secure peace," was the statement of the Conqueror.

As proof of his excellent intentions, he had imposed his brother Joseph upon Naples and his brother Louis upon Holland. He had occupied Ragusa and sanctioned the Rhine Confederation, which, despite Talleyrand's efforts,

had sacrificed a number of small states as a result of the decrees of 1803.¹

France was not dazzled by the powerful rays of her military glory. The mantle of her apparent prosperity covered hideous sufferings. Her credit was at a low ebb. Money was scarce and business at a standstill. The French banks had suspended payment² and Paris was abnormally depressed. This state of penury following upon a series of brilliant victories gave food for reflection as to what might be the dire result of a crushing defeat. England was unassailable in her island and relentless in her hostility. Aided by continental diversions and fresh difficulties fostered by her gold, she remained the one dark spot upon the horizon.³

Although hating Napoleon's despotic Government, Charles Fox, the Liberal leader and Foreign Minister, deemed himself bound by honour and all self-respect to warn Talleyrand in his letter of the 14th of October, 1806, of a murderous plot which had been hatched against the Emperor. The French Minister sent his profuse thanks to London. Seizing the opportunity, he made offers of a friendly nature and expressed his keen desire to come to an immediate understanding with Great Britain. All this was made impossible, owing to the divergences existing between the reciprocal conditions put forward.

Talleyrand had once more brought his favourite theme under discussion. He endeavoured to include in the circle of peace a nation whose strength was secured by her sea-belt, and whose gold and able diplomacy could produce continental risings. He could not, however, prosecute the one desire of his life.

The Napoleonic scheme was to make England re-

¹ At the treaty of Presbourg, Giulay and Jean de Lichtenstein, the Austrian plenipotentiary, had asked the Conqueror to include Ragusa in the Maritime Provinces of Venice. Talleyrand supported their request, saying that "the question at issue was one of minor importance," but Napoleon differed from him and proved it by keeping Ragusa.

² 12th July, 1806.

³ This financial crisis in Paris was brought about by the machinations of the London Market.

sponsible towards Europe of the constant dangers which threatened her safety and her independence and then to play the generous part of peacemaker for the sake of universal happiness and in behalf of humanitarian principles.

England and her King gave a chilly reception to the overtures of the Head of the French Government. This was the title conferred upon Napoleon, to whom that of Emperor was still begrudged.

On the 4th February Talleyrand had presented to the Senate an extremely able report, the moral effect of which was far-reaching. He had done so as the interpreter of Napoleon's line of conduct, every detail of which he justified, though not believing very much in the words he spoke or wrote to order.

The conflicting policies of Napoleon and of England were set forth in a manner most advantageous to the former belligerent. The report dwelt upon the extreme moderation of the Emperor's views, his great desire for peace, if such were rendered possible and the necessity to which he was driven by his adversaries to impose those views sooner or later by annihilating the one Power which disturbed the peace of the world.

Regnault, the Councillor of State, improved upon the Minister's words in terms of optimistic idolatry. He concluded thus, "All is well indeed with the Eagles."

He boldly asserted that neither the Sovereign nor the nation need apprehend the results of a war, the brunt of which would fall upon the enemy. England would be the first to feel its pressure, but what had the French nation to fear? No dark shadow could obscure its prosperity. Thank Heaven, this happy country was not, like England, at the mercy of Parliamentary factions, or intoxicated by excessive liberty. It depended solely upon the benefits derived from its Emperor and upon celestial favours.

"All that France asks from Heaven is that the sun may continue to shine and that the rain may fall upon her soil thus giving her rich harvests."

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This was asserted with the utmost coolness. We shall now see to what extent these prophecies were realised.

The wounds inflicted at Austerlitz were not yet healed when the results of the Peace of Presbourg were again discussed. Suddenly the armaments of Prussia and of Spain upset the calculations of the Emperor who had fondly thought that he could use them for the furtherance of his cherished dream. He hoped to reach Constantinople with their help. On the 12th of September, 1806, he wrote to Talleyrand :

“ I have no interest in upsetting the peace of Europe. Prussia and Russia are divided by many causes of hatred and rebellion. The latter will perhaps make some sacrifices in order to attack Turkey and the contingency of my being attacked alone by Prussia is not worth discussing.”

Notwithstanding all this, Prussia was boldly asserting herself and he began to consider how he would overcome possible difficulties and adversaries of the first or second rank, who might attempt to delay his conquest of Eastern Europe. England had rejected all thoughts of peace. The negotiations between Lord Yarmouth, Lord Lauderdale and Talleyrand had been brought to an abrupt close.

The important agreement which Napoleon had hoped to effect with the very subtle Alexander ¹ had proved quite illusory. The Tzar felt he had nothing to fear from the banks of the Vistula, thanks to his understanding with Prussia. He was also certain that a rupture between France and England was near at hand. He therefore hesitated to abandon to Napoleon a prey which he might be able to secure alone in the Balkans.

Russia strongly advised Spain to resist him with all her might and declared herself ready to throw in her lot with the Prussian monarchy.

¹ Reports furnished by the Comte Regnault de Saint-Jean at the Courts, January, 1805.

The Continental war had begun again. Prussia's share in it was premature and very costly.

Frederick William III started badly and eventually lost half his States. The cordon of resistance was broken through and within thirty days the whole country-side was in the hands of the Conqueror. Talleyrand was summoned to Berlin, the Emperor's head-quarters, to negotiate with M. de Zastrow, the King's confidential aide-de-camp and with Lucchesini, his Ambassador in Paris. An armistice was concluded, but never put in force, because of the disaster experienced by the Prussian troops in the capitulation of Magdebourg.

While Napoleon was congratulating himself upon this happy result, he was apprised of the death in Holland of his nephew, "The little Napoleon," whom he had looked upon in the light of a son. The news was conveyed to him with much precaution. This was hardly necessary, for on learning it he betrayed no emotion. As he was about to appear at a public function, Talleyrand said to him :

"Your Majesty, it is common knowledge that your family has just suffered a great loss, and as all eyes are upon you, it would be wise to assume a bearing suitable to the circumstances."

"Do you think, then, that I waste my time thinking of the dead?" was the callous answer made by this strange man.

In the meantime an official panegyrist in Paris was shedding literary tears, describing the poignant grief of the hero which made him forget his victories as he sorrowfully wept over the loss of this dear child. He had little time to devote to such thoughts, absorbed as he was by Spain's disloyalty and by the consideration of what might be the result of the continental blockade which he had ordered against England. Moreover, he had to conclude the present campaign against untold odds. "It was indeed strange," wrote Talleyrand, "to see the Emperor leaving the study of the great Frederick whence he had just dispatched fresh orders to his Army, to dine with Mollendorf,

his prisoner, and Müller, the historian of the Prussian monarchy, who were both his guests. During dinner he paid them their salaries, which they accepted and as soon as the repast was over he drove swiftly on to Posen."

The Emperor used to compel Talleyrand to follow him in all his campaigns, so that the diplomat might enforce the results obtained on the field of battle. The Minister was often obliged against his wish to travel in a military chaise across vast tracts poisoned by the fœtid atmosphere of death. The emotions and fatigue caused by these irksome journeys made him yearn all the more for peace among kings and men. He followed Napoleon to Poland. He witnessed the enthusiastic greetings which were afforded to the "Liberator" at Posen and at Warsaw. He was at Posen when his Emperor treated with the Elector of Saxony, who joined the league of the Rhine and assumed the title of King on the 11th December, 1806. He was able to note that warfare saps all consideration for the property of one's fellow-man.

The Emperor was reading the list of art treasures in the Gallery of Dresden when Denon advised him to select what masterpieces he required. Talleyrand entered the study as he was still perusing the catalogue and Napoleon sought his advice. Talleyrand replied: "If Your Majesty removes any of the Dresden pictures, it would be more than the King of Saxony has ever dared to do. He has never hung one of them in his own palace, for he considers they are the property of the nation."

"Yes," said the Emperor, "he is an excellent man and I would not like to cause him pain. I shall give orders that nothing must be touched. It will be time to see to this later on."

Talleyrand had to remain at Warsaw, surrounded by a *corps diplomatique* only too anxious to please him. He was daily waited upon by German Ministers, whose masters had the audacity to think of extending their own power. The Viennese Government was represented by Baron de Vincent, whose duty it was to see that no

change was effected with regard to Poland's former possessions which had accrued to Austria since the last division of territory. His task was facilitated by Talleyrand, who was ever well-disposed towards Austria. Circumstances aided him, for Napoleon had authorised him on the 8th of December, 1806, to sound Austria as to a mutual agreement concerning the Ottoman spoils.

The occupations of Prince de Bénévent at Warsaw were both varied and numerous. Some of them had never been contemplated by him, such as the government and administration of the city which Napoleon compelled him to undertake, because the former Governor was utterly incapable of discharging his duties. The famous diplomat refers to this incident in an interesting passage of his *Memoirs* :

“ I had to see that the troops were clad and dispatched to their destinations ; I had to visit hospitals, witness the dressings of the wounded, distribute moneys and I was even compelled to dictate to the Governor his orders of the day.”

His task was considerably facilitated by the valuable help he received from some high-born Polish ladies, such as the Comtesse Vincent Tyszkiewicz, sister of Prince Poniatowski. Her great kindness and devotion evoked feelings of gratitude in him, which caused him to regret having to bid good-bye to the fair ones of Warsaw.

Napoleon's first expedition was interrupted by the bad condition of the roads. For several weeks he was compelled to resist the temptation of repulsing the Russians, whom he called “ Barbarians and new Europeans.” The mud of Pulstuck had clogged his ardour. As he could not fight, he decided to enjoy life.

While whole battalions were being buried in the marshes of Poland, he ordered that the Court which had remained with the Empress at Mayence should forthwith indulge in balls and other festivities. When Talleyrand saw that these instructions were received by many with sadness and apprehension, he exclaimed : “ Ladies, the Emperor

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is not joking when he commands you to amuse yourselves."

Before the holocausts of Eylau and Friedland had decimated the brilliant ranks of officers as ruthlessly as they had mowed down those of the humble soldiery, Warsaw was filled with gold and silver-braided uniforms, the wearers of which received many marks of favour from the Polish ladies. The élite of Polish society found it somewhat difficult at first to organise social functions, inasmuch as "the Liberators" occupied almost all the houses in which one could hold receptions. It was eventually decided that the first host should be M. de Talleyrand, Lord High Chamberlain and Minister for Foreign Affairs. It was duly announced that only fifty ladies would be invited, but this number was largely exceeded, owing to the intrigues, petitions, and attempts of those who wished to be reckoned among the guests of one of the most famous men in Europe. The Emperor and the Princess were to be present and this fact alone was sufficient to whet the self-pride and curiosity of the Polish aristocrats.

The ball was magnificent and attended by a most remarkable set of people. The circumstances under which it took place and the incidents to which it gave rise lend additional interest to the proceedings. Murat was present in full uniform. He was highly theatrical, in manner and in appearance, as became "*a Prince of his blood.*" So great was his ambition to become a king, that he forgot the cottage of his birth, and schooled himself with the conviction that he came from a princely stock. He spoke in high tones and with wonted affectation of Jean Sobieski, "The Soldier King," whose crown he hoped to inherit as a natural result.¹

The Emperor had danced a set of lancers, and this was the prelude to his liaison with Madame Walewska.²

¹ Even at this early period, the family of Bonaparte had designs upon the Throne of Poland. His brother Jérôme hoped to occupy it. Murat, who had displayed great valour during the campaign, also harboured the hope of ascending its steps.

² The rendezvous was not long deferred. It took place the following evening.



MADAME ARNAULT, A GUEST AT THE IMPERIAL COURT

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"How do you think I dance?" he said laughingly to the Comtesse Potocka Wonsowicz. "I suppose you are making fun of me."

"In truth, Majesty, you dance perfectly, considering you are a great man," was the witty answer she gave him.

It was inspired by the admiration she felt for him, for it was an admitted fact that Napoleon danced badly and awkwardly. The same great lady did not express a very valuable opinion of Talleyrand. She had heard that he was the ablest and wittiest of men, but he gave her the impression of one who was bored and tired of everything. She took a dislike to him from the very first and her feelings towards him became more embittered as time went by. She said he was a greedy fortune-hunter, jealous of the favours of a master whom he hated, a man without character or principle, whose soul and appearance were equally unhealthy. He was probably sad that evening, meditating, perhaps, upon the sorrows and evils which must follow in the wake of victories so dearly bought. Talleyrand's ball was followed by those given by Prince Borghese and Prince Murat. Besides the dancing entertainments, weekly receptions were held at the Castle. The Emperor had brought with him Paër the famous composer and his whole orchestra, so that excellent music was provided for his guests, who wound up the evening at whist.

The roads were still impassable, owing to the heavy rains and war was not even mentioned. Some went so far as to assert that the Emperor would not resume hostilities until the spring. Many Polish ladies, well-wishers of the French in 1807, rejoiced to their hearts' content at the thought that they would long enjoy the pleasant company of the French officers. On the 5th of February Napoleon made a sudden start over the frosty ground and the Army was ordered to advance. He was flying to the help of Bernadotte, who was assailed at Mohrungen by Bennigsen's whole Army Corps. The troops experienced great sufferings. At the inception of the first expedition they had almost been deprived of

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commissariat, owing to the state of the roads in which the wheels sank up to their axles. On the second occasion, Napoleon's army had to contend with extreme cold and to bear the brunt of a deadly and desperate attack over a vast area of marshy ground. Napoleon had not expected to meet with such energetic resistance. He began by announcing his intention of hurling the Army against what he was pleased to call the remnants of the Russian Army. He was confronted by these remnants at Eylau on the 8th of February, when he was only accompanied by Soult, Murat, Augereau, and the Imperial Guard.

The fray was one of the most awful butcheries that ever stained a battlefield. It produced a painful impression in Europe. Stocks fell in Paris. The Russians interpreted their tragic resistance as a victory and lustily sang the *Te Deum* over the gaping graves. Napoleon remained a whole week in Eylau, so as to make sure of his victory and to impart fresh confidence to his subjects. He devoted his time to abortive negotiations with the King of Prussia and Alexander's generals. He had directed Talleyrand to write to Zastrow, the Prussian Foreign Secretary, whose recent advances had been ignored and to whom the French Minister was now instructed to propose both peace and an alliance.

When Talleyrand heard the details of the frightful massacre at Eylau, he indulged in sad reflections upon the fate of Europe. He then meditated upon the instability of a political institution which rested solely upon the life of a man ever exposed to the dangers of warfare.

“What should we have done had he been killed and what could we do if his death occurred at any moment?” was the question he put to the Duc de Dalberg, his trusted friend. Replying to himself, he proceeded to name Joseph, the Emperor's elder brother, as a possible successor. He added that it would be necessary to reassure Europe by stating that France would forthwith retire beyond the Rhine and respect it as her frontier. From that day Talleyrand conceived

new ideas and proceeded to prepare the means of his own salvation in the coming storm.

The triumphant victory at Friedland broke up the coalition, and great hopes were entertained after Tilsitt, but in his opinion the fatal day of reckoning was inevitable. He did not lose a chance of securing a way out, a retreat and a haven of rest for such time as Napoleon's star might cease to shine in the firmament of success. He felt that whether he resigned or whether he was dismissed, he would not be long at the head of a department the administration of which was rendered impossible by events like those which had occurred with Spain. His prudent and moderate views clashed with the autocratic wishes of the Master of Europe.

Napoleon's resolution to destroy the Spanish branch of Bourbon at any cost was proclaimed by him in the presence of Talleyrand. This occurred on the morrow of an imprudent proclamation issued by Godoï, the ill-advised Prince of Peace. He stated in it that Spain was about to fly to the help of the King of Prussia, little knowing that at that very moment a terrible tragedy was being enacted at Eylau.

The Minister also resolved on that occasion that he would lend no further help to the vexatious work of violence which was being perpetrated by his master.

As a last resort he had endeavoured to argue with him and to restrict the field of his conquests :

“ We do not know enough about Spain and we can hardly hope to acquire useful knowledge of her, or to come into friendly contact with her by such acts of violence. Spain would provide France with a great farming ground, well worth a rental and the payment of certain deems and royalties, but as we do not know the ground, we run the risk of losing everything if we try to cultivate it ourselves.”

He argued in vain. He had ceased to be a demigod in the opinion of his master who still resented

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the fact that Talleyrand had attenuated the harsh conditions of the treaty of Presbourg. Napoleon now mistrusted the corrections and alterations effected by his Minister at the last moment and as a result he denied him any part in the stipulations of Tilsitt.

He feared lest he might not carry out the rigorous measures he meant to enact against Russia, crushed and annihilated as she was. He therefore did not allow him to discuss the conditions of peace or the evacuation of the territory occupied by the French troops. His diffidence in this matter was fully justified, for Talleyrand had never entertained the idea that Prussia should be politically sacrificed. This was a policy which he resisted alike under the Directoire, the Consulate and the Empire.¹ Both in 1806 and in 1807 he had condemned the harsh treatment meted out to her, knowing full well that it was bound to sow the seeds of lasting hatred in the soul of a proud nation. Napoleon preferred to entrust Marshal Berthier with the execution of his wishes, considering him more competent to settle questions of warfare and reprisals. Talleyrand's signing of the contract was a mere formality.

Napoleon and Alexander had privately laid down the terms of the treaty accepted by General Kalkreuth and Count de Goltz, the Prussian plenipotentiaries. In accordance with its terms the House of Brandebourg had to yield all its territorial possessions, or in other words, every one of its possessions between the Elba and the Rhine. It is well known that the Conqueror of Friedland did not admit Frederick William to take any part in the negotiations. He added insult to injury by asserting that he only tolerated the continuance of

¹ On the 17th February, year VI (6th January, 1798), he wrote to Treilhard (Minister plenipotentiary of the French Republic at the Congress of Radstadt):

“We are anxious that Prussia should have better proofs of our sincerity and if hers is as great as ours she will soon understand that far from wishing to sacrifice her, we wish to protect her, because we look upon her as the natural ally of the Republic.”

Frederick's State out of consideration for the Emperor of Russia.

Most of the work was already accomplished by the Franco-Russian treaty which Prince de Bénévent had to exchange with Prince Kourakin. As a result of it, peace was once more established between the Tzar and the Emperor of the French. Alexander became the enemy of his recent allies and the friend of Napoleon, his greatest enemy. This union had been cemented by the blood spilt at Eylau. Russia undertook to declare war against England on the following 1st of December. In exchange for these good services, France, or rather her Master, promised his mediation and later his armed intervention against Turkey, the traditional ally of his diplomatic policy. Furthermore, secret articles were drawn up by which the division of the Ottoman Empire was determined.¹

The Tilsitt interview was not only a sensational epilogue of a twenty months' war that gave rise to one long hope for peace; it was also the magnetic point of contact which caused a sudden outburst of warm friendship between the two autocrats.

Alexander's nature was prompt and variable. He was as quick to love as he was to hate, once his enthusiasm had been cooled by the promptings of sullen mistrust. After Tilsitt he was dazzled by the vision of his coming share of glory and of greatness and had become convinced of his everlasting gratitude and of his admiration for the incomparable qualities of the most glorious son of man. The shifty ways of the Slav had not been analysed by Napoleon, who felt gratified by the young Emperor's appreciation of the vast schemes of conquest conceived by him and showed his keen desire to promote them without betraying the slightest apprehension. They assured one another that the interests of their people could and should be mutual.

¹ Napoleon had seized upon the rising of the Janissaries and the overthrow of Sélim III as a pretext for sacrificing Turkey at Tilsitt, having previously hurled her against Russia.

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What was needed most in order to strengthen an alliance? A common enemy, and who could this common enemy be but England, the consistent aggressor of France, the ungrateful partner of Russia? Hand in hand, the two monarchs happily dreamt of the realisation of their magnificent schemes. They fancied themselves disposing at will of an imaginary empire annexed to their vast domains.

The idea of an expedition to India, conceived in the brain of Napoleon, had given greater scope to this perspective. British preponderance must be annihilated in the Levant. Hindustan and her immense wealth must be snatched from England's grasp. Russia's share of the spoils would not be smaller than that of France. Of this, the Tzar was fully assured. He felt that a vast horizon was opened to him upon the banks of the Danube and towards the East, while the French Army was exhausting itself upon the barren plains of Spain. He felt that he was following in the glorious footsteps of Sialostof, of Peter the Great, and of Catherine II. His enthusiasm and fervent admiration were kindled and his gratitude knew no bounds towards the great man who afforded him an opportunity of sharing his glory in the history of the world.

They exchanged mutual congratulations and conferred honours and dignities upon each other.

"I hate the English as much as you do," said Alexander.

"Once France and Russia have joined hands, they will master the world," replied Napoleon. Alexander was not as much deceived as his new ally.

Talleyrand witnessed the accolades at Tilsitt and the humiliating conditions inflicted upon the King of Prussia and his beautiful and patriotic Queen Louise, who had been urged, almost compelled, to take useless steps in behalf of their kingdom. On the eve of the day when it was dismembered, she was invited to dinner by the Tzar Alexander and the Emperor Napoleon. She was compelled to dry her tears. It was at this

meeting of Tilsitt that Napoleon first saw Amélie-Louise-Wilhelmine. He called her "the enchantress" and sarcastically nicknamed her "*the modern Bradamante.*"

"What a beautiful woman!" he exclaimed in the presence of his officers and of his Foreign Minister.¹

One of his generals who had become a courtier promptly added :

"By and by, when seated next to you, she will be a rose beside a wreath of laurels." She had hoped to soften the Conqueror, but he obstinately ignored the Queen while studiously courting the pretty woman. He offered her a bouquet of roses which he had made himself.

"We know very little of each other," she sighed as the blush of modesty left a pretty colour on her cheeks.

Napoleon insisted: "Pray accept these flowers, Madame, as a sweet omen of the friendship which I bear you."

The pale and trembling Princess took the flowers. As she thought of the safety of her country and of those dear to her, she grew somewhat bolder and asked that the stronghold of Magdebourg might be restored to them.

"Magdebourg, Magdebourg, you cannot think of it, Madame," replied Napoleon, like one evading seduction. He left her with Talleyrand, telling him to console her. Talleyrand accomplished his task most conscientiously. He had seen her in despair, abandoned by the ally from whom she had expected so much, treated like a Court doll by the enemy who made fun of her entreaties and expended upon her the maximum of his sentimentality. In the presence of the Emperor, he so often repeated a dignified answer of the Queen of Prussia, that he met with the following

¹ "The Queen of Prussia is really charming, but you need not feel jealous. I am like a piece of oilcloth off which all such matters slide. It would cost me too much trouble to flirt with or to court any woman" (Napoleon's letter to Joséphine, 8th July, 1807).

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rebuke: "I fail to appreciate the beauty of the Queen's remark and I shall feel obliged, Monsieur le Prince, if you will desist from quoting it."¹

Napoleon and Alexander took leave of each other in a touching way. They were both destined to become mortal enemies and were already trying to see how they would deceive each other.

Napoleon was still intoxicated by the display of his power at Tilsitt. He was convinced that he had duped the young and impressionable Emperor of Russia, who, however, was far from simple-minded, and that he was destined to have the last say in the inevitable conflict between their rival ambitions. Alexander had departed in a stream of light. He considered he had proved his friendship towards the King of Prussia by securing for him the nominal possession of his kingdom and was highly pleased at the result of negotiations which had rendered his defeat as profitable as a victory.

Talleyrand thought the Tzar's departure somewhat premature. He had left before acquiring the certainty that the verbal conventions agreed upon with Napoleon would be accurately fulfilled and he did not know whether Frederick William would not be compelled to obtain at the price of fresh sacrifices the strips of territory which had been left to him.

The French Minister had heard strange words spoken after the imperial interviews and felt deep pity for the Queen of Prussia, whose misfortunes and patriotic dignity appealed to his better feelings. It is difficult to say whether he was charmed by her beauty or only moved by that sympathy begotten by the great sufferings of others. He had displayed the utmost attention towards the lady who had undertaken the useless journey from Berlin to Tilsitt. He jealously preserved the memory

¹ Napoleon had abruptly asked her the following question:

"How did you dare to go to war, when you were so poorly equipped?"

"Sire, I must confess to Your Majesty that the glory of Frederick had deceived us as to our real power."

This word *glory*, so happily used at Tilsitt in the drawing-room of the Emperor Napoleon, struck Talleyrand as superb.

of her parting words, so sweetly spoken that they moved him to tears :

“ Monsieur le Prince de Bénévent, there are only two people here who regret that I have come, you and myself. I hope you will not be annoyed if I depart with this conviction.”

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Tilsitt was the culminating point of the Emperor's greatness. Such was the power of the French Empire on the Continent that it seemed unassailable, and there was no reason to think that its militant policy would be checked after Tilsitt any more than it had been stayed by the treaty of Amiens.

As soon as the treaty was signed and ratified, Talleyrand returned to France. He spent a few days at Dresden. The dignified and peaceful habits of the court of Saxony, the public and private virtues of King Frederick Augustus I and the sincere and kindly greeting extended to him, created a lasting impression upon his mind.

He did not know whether he was to resume his duties, stripped of all authority, after a year of absence, during which he had suffered many disappointments and weathered many storms.

The force of circumstances had made him a Minister of conquests, though at heart he was essentially a man who respected ancient and time-honoured limitations. He had been obliged to travel much faster than he wished. Though he remained a peacemaker on principle, as a Minister he had to sign and endorse certain acts which in his opinion were neither just nor lasting. Whether he resigned or not is a moot point. He was perhaps compelled to do so by the fact that the Emperor chose to exalt him in rank, while holding him aloof from responsible office and replacing him by a weak and submissive Minister like M. de Champagny.

His Memoirs do not contain the true explanation, to wit, that he was compelled to relinquish his office

when appointed Vice-Grand Elector and Arch-Chancellor of State. He relinquished the Foreign Office before acquainting anyone of the fact, but under conditions which certainly left no room for regret.

The Emperor returned to his capital after an absence of ten months, leaving the half of Germany garrisoned by his soldiery. While *Te Deums* of triumph were still re-echoed throughout the land, he was pleased to dispense exceptional favours around him. Talleyrand had played a considerable part during the recent campaign. His diplomatic and administrative services at Warsaw were all-important, as he was compelled at a critical time to find provisions and stores for the Army. He was given the title of *Vice-Grand Elector*,¹ not only for services rendered, but also with the object of binding him more closely to the Throne. His new rank gave him precedence over all Ministers, and, together with the Arch-Chancellor and the Arch-Treasurer, he belonged to the hierarchy of Imperial Dignitaries. These titles were both pompous and artificial.

This pseudo-disgrace, cloaked with additional honours, was mainly due to the divergence of ideas between the Chief of the State and the Prince, who each day failed to agree upon the direction to be given to the foreign policy of France. Napoleon had not been slow to create this divergence, so that he might exclude from the circle of political activity a statesman upon whom were set the eyes of Europe to the detriment of himself. He had been unable to hide this impression when he confessed one day that upon his return from Tilsitt he had had good cause to resent the preponderance of his Foreign Secretary and the exaggerated opinion which the foreign Powers had conceived of his abilities.

It was the express wish of the Emperor that Champagne should be transferred from the Home Office to the Foreign

¹ The title of Grand Elector was vested in Joseph, who had become King of Naples, till such time as he was to occupy the tottering Throne of Spain. That of Arch-Chancellor was held by Eugène, Viceroy of Italy.

Office. Talleyrand's successor was described by Madame de Rémusat as a man whose intellect and wit revolved in a very narrow circle. Before investing him, Prince de Bénévent had to perform the ceremony of handing over the seals of office and of presenting to his successor the staff which was henceforth to serve under him.

"Sir," he said, in a most serious tone, "allow me to introduce to you these highly commendable gentlemen, who will give you every satisfaction. You will find them faithful, able, punctual, but in no way zealous, thanks to my good training."

This unexpected praise caused much surprise to M. de Champagny.

"Yes, sir," continued Talleyrand, "with the exception of a few junior clerks who address their envelopes with indecent haste, everyone here is essentially calm and never hurried. In a short time you will be called upon to discuss the interests of Europe with His Majesty and you will then see how impolitic it is ever to seal and transmit his wishes without mature reflection."

He had often said that in diplomatic questions he first had to negotiate with Bonaparte, whose sudden impulses and undue precipitation must be curbed before foreign overtures were attempted. With the advent of his pale successor all discussions ceased at the Foreign Office. There was an end to respectful contradictions, to any difference of opinions, for all opinions now were but the pale reflections of those of the Master. Henceforth, whether it be with Champagny, Duc de Cadore, or with Maret, Duc de Bassano, Napoleon was free to alter the map of Europe in accordance with his wishes. During Maret's tenure of office, messengers were ever held in readiness to bear in haste to each Sovereign the angered messages or violent threats of Bonaparte.

Talleyrand hungered for active occupation, living in the hope that before long his advice would be sought and that he would not be let linger in the false light of an empty and pompous title.

Bonaparte did not, however, betray the slightest desire

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to consult Talleyrand. With the help of Champagny, as his ideal and subservient Secretary, he considered that alone he could handle and direct the affairs of Europe. He had grown accustomed to do without a coadjutor who thought himself indispensable. Talleyrand was cruelly disappointed, but never complained, contenting himself with blaming the faults which had been committed and in which he had had no part.

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The compensations offered to him were great indeed. He received a salary of £20,000 a year, though he bore no responsibilities and had very little work. In addition to being Vice-Grand Elector and Grand Chamberlain, he held the principality of Bénévent and wore the grand cordon of the Legion of Honour. He possessed an income of £12,000 a year himself, to say nothing of the huge sums paid to him secretly for the different treaties which he signed. These represented *the secret funds of his diplomacy*.

On leaving the Foreign Office, Talleyrand returned to his house in the Rue d'Anjou-Saint-Honoré. He did not mean to convert it into the retreat of a sad philosopher filled with bitterness and regret. He had not forsaken his titles of Prince of the Empire and Grand Chamberlain of the Court, and he meant to enjoy in his private residence every pleasure that wealth and luxury could procure. He kept open house and an excellent table at which his guests were sure to enjoy all the refinements of culinary art. He delighted in entertaining distinguished foreigners and gave receptions and musical "At Homes" with the concourse of the best artists of the day. His State receptions were considered the acme of aristocratic splendour. His house had become too small for all those who were eager to be bidden to it, so Prince de Bénévent purchased the sumptuous Hotel Monaco in the Rue de Varennes.

Stock Exchange speculations occasionally upset the

equilibrium of his wealth. Talleyrand was always a gambler and many of his carefully devised operations were thwarted by unforeseen crises. When the peace of Amiens was signed he purchased consolidated stock to the extent of millions, in hopes of a rise. There was a great depreciation in Government funds, the cause of which was not suspected by him at the time. It was due to the bad impression produced upon England by the said treaty, and this transaction alone cost him two millions of francs. The failure of a bank financed by him was another financial accident which seriously upset his budget. It did not ruin him, but for a time he was considerably pressed for money. When the Emperor heard of this he decided to purchase his Chamberlain's palace for one million two hundred thousand francs in cash.¹

Talleyrand thanked him sincerely and resumed his normal mode of life. He bought in his beautiful books and valuable pictures, with which he adorned and furnished his new residence in the Rue Saint-Florentin. He remained there until his death, and continued to observe with keen foresight the faults by which Napoleon was jeopardising his destiny and that of France.

¹ *Napoleon's Correspondence*, vol. xxiii., p. 201.

CHAPTER IX

THE NAPOLEONIC COURT

The Emperor's Palace—Talleyrand resumes the duties of Lord Chamberlain—The exalted duties and the petty subjections pertaining to his office—His Majesty's "Etiquette"—Curious rivalries at Court and the part played by Talleyrand in reconciling them—Descriptions of the Court—A State reception at the Palace of the Tuileries—Under the First Empire—A group of high dignitaries—The Imperial Family—The ladies of the Palace—Madame de Rémusat and Talleyrand—Some beautiful guests—Napoleon's behaviour towards them—Sad impressions caused by a great picture.

TALLEYRAND had been deprived of his portfolio as Minister for Foreign Affairs, but he remained Lord Chamberlain. His duties as such were comparatively light, but they imposed upon him a certain amount of subjection somewhat incompatible with the natural pride of a free man. His position, however, was an exalted one. His was one of the four principal offices at Court under the late monarchy, vested by right in the princely House of Bouillon.

Talleyrand was astute enough to obtain the same office from Louis XVIII, on leaving the Cabinet. When referring to the fact he wittily remarked, "that his downfalls were far more remunerative than his services." This position was far from being an honorary one at the Imperial Court. It carried other duties besides that of wearing a sumptuous purple uniform covered with silver braid. The Lord High Chamberlain was a very active personality. He had to supervise the whole service of the household and of the wardrobe, all Court performances, receptions, and official functions. All the Chamberlains of the Emperor and Empress were

under his orders. His exalted rank did not save him from certain menial duties which he performed reluctantly.

During the festivals of 1806 at Warsaw a high-born Polish lady was shocked to see M. de Talleyrand, the most respected of diplomats, walk across the drawing-room with a napkin on his arm, carrying a tray, upon which was a glass of lemonade which he offered to His Majesty the Emperor, whom he called an upstart. He always preceded His Majesty in processions and heralded his coming at Court functions. On such occasions the doors were thrown open and M. de Talleyrand advanced solemnly, pronouncing in a deep voice, those magic words which caused the world to tremble :

“ The Emperor ! ”

To Monsieur de Rémusat he entrusted all matters concerning the administration of the household. When he had accomplished his duties towards the Emperor, he was compelled to comply with those exacted by His Majesty's “ Etiquette.”

This austere Sovereign was indeed a hard disciplinarian. The customs obtaining in palaces were observed at the Tuileries more jealously and more punctiliously than in the days of kings. Personal pretensions to rank and state were the more vain, as neither rank nor title held sway with Napoleon, however decorative they might prove at the Tuileries.

The wearing of a broad ribbon to the left or to the right, the entry through one door or another, the access to this drawing-room or that, granted to one and refused to another, gave rise to strong emotions and evoked bitter recriminations. It was Talleyrand's official duty to determine the validity of all rights, to judge these competitions in gold and silver lace, to state on which side the ribbon should be worn, to put an end to these strifes of precedence, so contemptible owing to the objective stakes, to pronounce as the supreme arbiter upon the relative merits of such bickerings.

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In these official duties he wasted much time, which he would have devoted gladly to the solution of international problems.

Disputes and wranglings caused by vanity were bitterly fought out. Certain women, though still surprised at being ladies and great ladies at that, were infatuated with ideas of nobility and ceremonial and defended their pseudo-rights with inordinate persistence.

Talleyrand could not have held aloof from these guerilla warfares, fought in his ante-room. The absorbing question of the Empress's mantle gave rise to very stormy conferences between Princes, Princesses, and Court officials. Napoleon insisted that his sisters, the newly created Princesses, twenty times prouder than born Archduchesses, should carry the train of the heavy and sumptuous garment at the coronation ceremony.

After long recriminations, accompanied by bitter tears, they submitted, because compelled to do so. A sop was thrown to their pride, for the words "Carry the train" were changed into an attenuated sentence, "Support the mantle." This did not prevent them from performing their duties with the worst possible grace on this solemn occasion. It was generally noticed that when they had to lift the train, they did so with their finger-tips and in a manner so feeble that the Empress was hardly able to proceed on her way. It is likely that they would never have recovered from the insult which they considered had been inflicted upon them by their brother, had their own trains not been carried by their own Chamberlains. It was Talleyrand who afforded them this compensation, so as to conciliate their ruffled feelings. He must have often fancied himself back under the old régime, which had witnessed such bitter struggles for the obtainment of the smallest privileges and under which matters of etiquette were deemed more important than State questions.

He had to discuss another matter no less weighty,



NAPOLEON THE FIRST IN HIS IMPERIAL ROBES

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which absorbed the attention of the Arch-Treasurer Lebrun, the Home Secretary, the Master of the Horse, the Earl-Marshal, and of Princes Louis and Joseph, all of whom met in Council under the Presidency of the Emperor himself. During several hours they argued the question at issue, whether their Imperial Highnesses should be authorised or not to wear ermine cloaks. Both Louis and Joseph were most eager to do so, but were denied this right which was declared to be the exclusive right of Sovereignty.

In addition to his many duties, the Lord High Chamberlain had to consider, grant, or reject, the applications for admission at Court and for all household appointments. Numerous lists were submitted to Talleyrand, whose perusal of them was more than eclectic, as he was hardly justified in displaying any bitterness towards political evolutions. These lists included the names of many who had sworn that they would never meet. There were revolutionaries of the Convention, liberals of one day and noblemen of ancient lineage who had forsaken the white rosette for the tricolour.

These sudden changes of colour and conscience were seldom accompanied by tact, modesty, or moderation. The new converts worshipped at Napoleon's shrine with almost indecent zeal. Foremost among them was the Abbé Maury, who had been created a Prince of the Church. This great defender of the Altar and the Throne had retired to Rome since the emigration, remaining entrenched there in the integrity of principles for which he had fought with energy before the days of the "Constituante." The new Cardinal soon grew tired of the Vatican and yearned to retire to his native soil. He wrote in this sense to Talleyrand, expressing his earnest wish to return to Paris.

Napoleon and his henchmen were then pursuing their triumphant course through Italy, amid the wild acclamations of the Italian people.

Maury¹ had grossly insulted Talleyrand by pen

¹ See Chapter III, pp. 91, 92.

and word of mouth, but the latter answered his letter, advising him to wait upon the Sovereign at Genoa. Maury did so, having proclaimed the fact that he was about to be received by the greatest of men. As soon as he was admitted to the Emperor's presence, he assumed such an obsequious demeanour that it shocked courtiers who were broken to the lowest bows. He remained on his knees, and was fully rewarded by Napoleon, who was not deceived by this hypocrite, but allowed him to follow in his trail. Talleyrand had not forgotten Maury's attacks when the Abbé was his colleague at the National Assembly, and, according to Mme de Rémusat,¹ he never failed to exercise his vengeance by turning into ridicule the vile flattery of the turncoat.

His birth, his rank, his past and present relations with the old aristocracy, facilitated the Lord Chamberlain's task in recruiting here and there fit and proper mummets for the Imperial performances. In the performance of this task he sometimes met with prompt and unlimited acquiescence, but was sometimes confronted by refusals which nothing could overcome. As an intimate friend of the Hotel de Luynes, a hot-bed of Royalist intrigues, he had been able to conciliate the independent Duchesse de Chevreuse. She had sullenly accepted the hand which led her to the Tuileries, there to occupy the position of lady-in-waiting to Joséphine. She soon became insupportable to the master of the house through her silent contempt and sarcasm. He was often compelled to bite his lips, owing to the vivacity of her answers, the last of which caused her to be exiled at a distance of a hundred and twenty miles from Paris.²

¹ Memoirs of Mme de Rémusat, vol. ii.

² This occurred in 1808: "I am not meant for a gaoler," she declared to the lady-in-waiting who had informed her that she was henceforth attached to the person of Maria-Louisa, the dispossessed Sovereign, wife of Charles IV, whose arrival in France was more that of a prisoner than a Queen.

Deprived of her friends and of her usual mode of life, the Duchesse de Chevreuse lingered on, a victim to consumption and melancholia, until she died at Lyons in 1813.

Neither Talleyrand nor the Emperor were ever able to overcome the animosity of Mme de Chevreuse, but the High Chamberlain was more fortunate in his endeavour to conciliate Mme de Montmorency. She consented to come to Court, after her friend Talleyrand had promised that she should be reinstated as the owner of certain forest lands which had been confiscated, but not sold. On the other hand, the Princesse de Guéménée was as intractable as the Duchesse de Chevreuse upon the question of rallying round the new Sovereign.

Talleyrand remembered that she had borne the title of "Governess to the Children of France." Anticipating events, he offered her the same post in the household of the Empress Joséphine.

"Do you wish to make fun of me, M. de Talleyrand?" was the proud answer of this daughter of the House of Rohan-Soubise. As only a Princess could fill this post, Talleyrand might have appointed his own wife to it, had he not had good reasons to fear that Napoleon might have put the same question as Mme de Montmorency :

"You mean to make fun of me, M. de Talleyrand?"

He had to look elsewhere, and to expend much tact and prudence in finding a suitable person for this exalted position.

His whole time was not absorbed by hard work and now and again he culled pleasant pastimes which afforded him a certain amount of distraction. At one of his morning receptions he was visited by a lady who had just been appointed at Court and who had come to swear the oath of allegiance. He noticed that she wore a very frivolous costume and smilingly said to her :

"Madame, you have come to swear fidelity in a very short skirt."

The Lord High Chamberlain organised official

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festivities, the details of which were left to his First Chamberlain, M. de Rémusat.

Court ceremonials and gala receptions were occasionally resorted to, in order to lighten an atmosphere laden with the smoke of the battlefield. They were magnificent functions, for neither trouble nor expense were spared in lending to them the fullest brilliancy. One function alone, which took place on the 16th of December, 1804, imposed on the City of Paris a heavy debt, which was not purged for years.

A happy City and a happy Nation! The marriage of the Princesse Stéphanie de la Pagerie and of Prince de Bade was a gorgeous social function. Prince de Bénévent was one of the bride's witnesses and her toilettes and jewels caused rapturous admiration. After the nuptial blessing, the wedding party repaired to the Tuileries. Napoleon led his adopted daughter by the hand and the guests followed with ponderous step, anxious to display their finery. The pace set by the Emperor was very brisk, much to the annoyance of the Empress and the Princesses, who were urged by the Chamberlains, eager to conform themselves to the master's step. His haste put Talleyrand to serious inconvenience, as he had to walk in front of the Emperor and was compelled to move slowly on account of his infirmity.

There was no such rush at the ordinary receptions at the Tuileries, where Talleyrand appeared in all his dignity, clad in sumptuous garments. On these occasions his stars and crosses were taken out of their cases and placed upon a divan, together with all his orders and decorations. He then chose the baubles which he meant to wear.

An observant eye-witness remarked that the most constellated ones were invariably conferred by the most insignificant Princes. Magnificently adorned, bedizened, powdered and perfumed, the Lord High Chamberlain would effect his entrance into the reception-rooms of His Imperial and Royal Majesty.

Let us now follow the crowd of guests and leisurely survey one of these fatuous entertainments.

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Diamonds, pearls and jewels of all sorts shone like stars upon the ladies' toilettes. Such splendour was a novelty, for the Court of the First Consul had long assumed military ways and its company was more than thin. The fact that General Augereau had grumbled like a swashbuckler at having to attend it was related with much merriment. Lannes was known to have hustled a whole group of bewildered emigrants when walking across the reception-room with his hand upon the hilt of his sword.

At the early reception held by the Imperial Court, inexperienced young persons who had married Bonaparte's aides-de-camp or the wives of his companions in arms, who had been suddenly transferred from their modest surroundings through their husbands' military feats, felt very ill at ease in their new surroundings. Very few of the new-comers possessed Court manners, which can only be acquired by the frequentation of Court circles. Their education was eventually completed by the help of society people and their manners soon showed great improvement. Even the soldiers became less awkward, and displayed less of the drill sergeant's ways.

Luxury was honoured during the intervals that occurred between the armed expeditions across Europe.

Those who had held most aloof from all pretensions to nobility soon obtained a Court brevet. Such discordances, such personal mishaps and breaches of good manners as still existed were lost sight of now that a numerous crowd forgathered at Napoleon's receptions.

Their brilliancy was not obscured by such light stains. Many of the guests were no doubt awkwardly situated when their gaze met that of certain persons whom they wished to avoid, for these gatherings brought together a

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curious amalgamation of names, titles, positions and recollections. Scions of the princely houses of France rubbed shoulders with one Count Merlin de Douai, who had framed the famous law against suspects, or with one Count Thibaudeau,¹ the ferocious Jacobin, who so willingly exchanged the ragged gear of *sans-culottism* for the Imperial livery. Last, but not least, among the new Imperialists, was Count Jean Baptiste Treillard, whose ears tingled under the Convention at the mere mention of the words "King" or "Majesty" and who had now become the man of all works, approving of everything and licking his Master's boots.

Without distinction, they executed the same menial obeisance before an Emperor who cared little what they had been or what they were now, because *his* existence had only begun on the 18th Brumaire.

Famous personalities could be recognised in uniforms richly braided in gold and silver.

Cambacérès, Savary and Maret, Berthier, Eugène de Beauharnais, Flahaut and Maret, Duc de Bassano, who was highly flattered by the confidence of those on high and much despised by Talleyrand for his painful want of intelligence, the Field-Marsals of France, with Dukes and Duchesses of ancient lineage or of recent creation and others who would have ranked as members of the footstool nobility² under Louis XV, took part in the proceedings.

Distinguished strangers were both numerous and covered with orders. The first to attract attention was the Austrian Ambassador, Clément de Metternich, with the inexpressible smile which oftener lit up his countenance at the thought of his boudoir victories than at the recollection of his diplomatic achievements.

¹ The strong and incorruptible Thibaudeau, who compared himself to a bar of iron.

² Duchesses are entitled to use footstools in the presence of Royalty.

On his braided sleeve he wore a bracelet made of Caroline Murat's hair.¹

Representatives of the old heraldry of France were present in small numbers, and carefully avoided fraying with the late Terrorists who had become high officials. While praying for the restoration of a legitimist monarchy, they were compelled to accept the invitation of a host whose invitations were stern commands. The greatest curiosity was awakened by the bevy of Bonapartes, which included the mother, brothers and sisters of the Emperor.

Nature has never afforded such a collection of weird and haughty members of the one family bereft of all family history, who had grown at haphazard upon an island almost unknown and lost in mid-ocean.

Proceeding by order, we must first consider the idiosyncrasies of "Madame-Mère," Laetitia Ramolino, married at the age of fourteen to Charles Bonaparte, who was eighteen. She was very handsome, and very proud of being the mother of four at the age of nineteen. She thought she had sprung from some ancient lineage which she could not determine with any degree of accuracy. Devoid alike of all culture and brain power, she knew instinctively when to remain silent and when to express an opinion. For years she was absorbed by the duties of a mother and a housewife. With very scanty means at her disposal, she kept a close watch upon money and neglected no detail in the management of her household. She respected the laws of silence and blind obedience which were ever in force among Corsican women. She was proud of the name she bore and with head erect was wont to assert that she was not inferior to any other woman. The phenomenal changes which occurred in her position and her destiny

¹ "I saw him at Saint-Cloud in 1810, and he wore a bracelet made out of the hair of Caroline Murat, who was then a lovely woman" (Stendhal's letter to Balzac: end of *La Chartreuse de Parme*).

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did not surprise her, for she considered the success achieved by her sons was well earned and quite natural.

Her fourth child by his birth, but the first by his genius, had opened up the road to power and glory and bade his brothers and sisters follow in his wake. They were soon fashioned into Princes and Princesses and housed in palaces which seemed to have sprung by magic from the earth, in order to accommodate them. Their pride and pretensions kept abreast of circumstances and often got completely out of hand. Laetitia remained unchanged in the essence of her being, immutable in her true nature. She preserved her language and all the principles which she had been taught throughout the unheard-of metamorphoses of events. As Dowager-Empress she was just as sparing of her words and her money, just as parsimonious as she had been during the most precarious period of her existence. A woman of common sense, she maintained her prudent, calculating course of life in the midst of fatuous splendour, as much through habit as through some presentiment of impending reverses. She used to say: "Who knows but some day I may have to provide bread for all these Kings of mine?" She had reached the age of fifty and was still in possession of such beauty as can be expected at that age. Her common sense and energy saved her from being dazzled or lulled to sleep by her exalted position. Her education was that of the average Corsican woman and she did not condescend to avoid the use of certain idioms and vulgarisms germane to her and to her island. She cared little for the opinion of the Emperor her son, or for that of her daughter-in-law, the Empress. The bearing of Bonaparte's mother towards his wife was one of extreme reserve. She had taken a dislike to Joséphine before he married her.¹ She called her a coquette and a dis-

¹ "Our mother was dissatisfied at the marriage of her son the General with the former Marquise de Beauharnais. Her main objection to the match, and indeed, the only one that she ever deigned to adduce, was that she thought her too old ever to become a mother" (*Memoirs of Lucien Bonaparte*).

ordered profligate. She had not the saving grace of being a Corsican. She was an exotic Parisienne, whose ambition was to crush alike the mother and daughters by displaying the manners of a high-born lady, and also by the help of her loud and lavish toilettes. Poor Joséphine tried in vain to bestow every attention and every mark of respect upon the obdurate old lady. She had to contend with the relentless animosity of the whole family of Bonaparte, which had sworn a vendetta against the Beauharnais from the very beginning.

Maria-Paoletta, or Paulette, who afterwards became Pauline, was the most peaceful member of this quarrelsome family. She was incapable of those feelings of hatred which generally spring in the hearts of those who are handicapped by plain features and embittered thereby. She was far too pretty, too self-satisfied, too proud of her beautiful eyes, her body and all her person, to indulge in wicked animosities or sour recriminations. She was spoilt from her childhood, petted and worshipped. The arch and pretty little girl won the heart of her brother the officer, and the serious manners and grave looks of Napoleon could never check her outbursts of childish joy.

He always displayed more indulgence towards Paoletta than he did towards any other human being. He romped with her as if he were a boy, but as soon as he left her he would resume the mask of stern gravity which he usually wore. Paulette was endowed with a light and joyous imagination, and this vain little woman spent hours daily in bestowing smiles upon her looking-glass.

Notwithstanding the strict education which obtained in her family, she was a born coquette with a wish to please that was soon developed by the numerous chances which she met with during her life. She had not had to wait for wooers. Girls grow fast under the Southern sun, and as early as the year 1797 Napoleon had to stop a certain project of marriage which would

have produced a disastrous effect in the family of these illustrious upstarts. Pauline Bonaparte was on the verge of marrying one Billon, a soapmaker at Marseilles. Another pretender to her hand was Fréron, late "Conventionnel" and the Commissary-General of the South, who enjoyed great prestige in the provinces where he was much feared. He was almost a dictator in the South of France, but fortune had not favoured him, notwithstanding the manœuvres and evolutions effected by him with the political parties. He was a politician with more subtlety than conviction, who eventually found himself confronted by powerful enmities. His position had become precarious, for the next violent reaction would have rent the clouds that had gathered over his head. It was at this juncture that Fréron sought the help of the Bonapartes. Lucien, his friend, introduced him to the family circle, in which the new-comer soon found that he could contract a very desirable alliance. Paulette was sixteen and beautiful. Had she not been the sister of a hero, her favours would have been sought just as eagerly, and the winner of such a prize would have lost nothing of its intrinsic value.

Fréron declared his intentions. She listened to him and with the spontaneity of her Italian nature proceeded forthwith to love him, protesting that no other man would ever be her husband. Fréron was a well-dressed man, but beyond that he was in no way seductive. He had a low forehead, a thick nose, goggle eyes, and thin lips. His physique was not in his favour. He enjoyed a deplorable reputation, and was then a man in the forties. Though he had played an important part in the country, he had run his full course and was practically a negligible quantity. Withal, Pauline was absorbed by Fréron and long remained adamant to her family's objurgations. She wrote to Fréron :—

"Yes, I swear to you, my beloved Stanislas, that I can never love another man but you."

To this solemn declaration she added many pretty things in Italian, the language of love.

They kept up an active correspondence for many months and Fréron received special encouragement at her hands in the shape of minor gleanings. He thought that the happy union would soon be an accomplished fact. Paulette displayed the greatest valour in defending him against his enemies.

He was to have been married in four days, when a terrible storm burst forth in Paris against Fréron and hurled him into the mud. He was doomed in political and private life, disowned by all. Napoleon forthwith ordered his sister to join her mother in Italy. Her heart could attach and detach itself with equal facility and its wound was soon healed in this new country. Its radical cure was effected the night she met the Adjutant-General, Victor Emmanuel Leclerc. He was only twenty-four and a handsome, charming fellow. She soon became his wife, to the intense regret of Generals Duphot and Junot, who were foremost among her would-be wooers.

Pauline Leclerc, who became the Princesse Borghèse by her second marriage, was ever Napoleon's favourite sister. He showed his preference for her on every possible occasion.

The graceful Paoletta was not as pliable as he would have wished. Napoleon was the autocratic head of his family, who intervened in everything and regulated the conduct of all its other members. He prescribed, knotted and unknotted at will their marriage ties and insisted that they should look to him alone for guidance as to what they should say or do. He constantly came into conflict with Pauline, who crossed him, contradicted him and bearded him when she thought fit. She went so far as to criticise Joséphine with the utmost harshness, asserting that her fits of temper, her kisses and her tears, were all artificial. Later on she attacked Marie-Louise with equal vehemence, till one day she was so rude to the Second Empress

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that Napoleon forbade her access to his Court. She consoled herself in her handsome residence at Neuilly, where she was followed by a company less numerous and less brilliant than that of the Tuileries, but infinitely more flattering, more animated and more gallant.

She was undoubtedly the most graceful woman at Napoleon's Court. She presented a beautiful picture in this well-lit Palace of Kings. Beside her stood her sister Marianne, who changed her name to Elisa. She had not been favoured by the Graces and did not share the beauty of her sister. The famous Canova would never have immortalised her features in the marble bust of the "Venus Genetrix." She was very tall and painfully thin, with black eyes that might have been handsome, had they not protruded. Her figure was flat, and her chest extremely poor. Paucity was written upon every line and contour of her body. For this reason, no doubt, Paschal Bacciochi, a Corsican Infantry Captain, was deemed good enough to become her husband. Yet she had some merits, for she was not devoid of intelligence. As her social position improved, she gave proofs of this. In her small principality of Lucques and Piombino, she directed affairs, organised the administration, encouraged agriculture, popular instruction, letters, science, art and only persecuted the brigands. She displayed the same tact and ability when she presided over the meetings of the Council. Her husband held aloof and played the fiddle.

Her efforts were not appreciated at the Tuileries, for her brother harboured a serious grievance against her. She, too, had proved restive under the heavy yoke of Napoleon. Her education, her tastes, her temperament did not engender a fanatical worship for the great man. He was no doubt an insatiable Conqueror, ever anxious to change the face of the world, but she preferred a proud, independent, and perhaps jealous nature, which refused to barter personal liberty and domestic happiness for slavery disguised by the wearing of a



MADAME DE TALLEYRAND

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crown. In other words, she had more respect, love, and friendship for her brother Lucien than for the Master of Europe. This predilection existed from her youth, when Napoleon treated her with Corsican roughness, while Lucien would come to her confiding his hopes, his aspirations, and his feelings of revolt against all military authority.

"My unhappiest child is always the one I love best," said Laetitia. Marie-Anne-Elisa shared her mother's feelings. Her heart went out to the brother who wielded least power, and as a result, the vile flatterers of the Master accused her of all the sins of Israel. She was well aware of the feelings which prevailed against her,¹ and it was only natural that in the midst of this brilliant assembly she should preserve a somewhat dissatisfied look and a sullen demeanour.

Let us now study the character of Caroline Murat, the most unruly member of the whole tribe of Bonapartes.

Napoleon once declared: "If Hortense wished to see me while I was presiding at the Council, I should come out to greet her, but if Madame Murat asked for me, I should not stir. I must always prepare for a pitched battle with her and in order to explain my views to a little woman belonging to my family, I should have to deliver longer speeches than those addressed to the Senate or the Council of State."

Caroline was essentially a strong woman, endowed

¹ The Emperor openly declared that he felt little sympathy for Elisa, that no intimacy had ever existed between them as their natures differed so widely. He proclaimed these facts far and wide whenever he could.

On the 17th September, 1811, he took General Savary to task because the Tuscany papers gave too much publicity to the sayings and doings of the Grand Duchess Elisa and because French crews had dared to give "Three cheers for Elisa," and "Three cheers for Napoleon," thus coupling the names of two individuals between whom there was nothing but antipathy.

"I shall make the Director of Police personally responsible for anything unseemly that may be published. The doings of Sovereigns evoke the greatest interest, but no one cares a jot about the doings of a Grand-Duchess."

This was written by Napoleon, the admirable brother.

with a strong mind. Her personal charms were as seductive as her wit and as powerful as her strength of character. She soon learnt the business of a Queen, and spoke and acted as one who meant to be heard and obeyed. She was afflicted with that thirst for power which was really a mania among the Bonapartes. In the bottom of her heart she nurtured no feelings of gratitude, submission, or fidelity towards her brother who was her Master. On the contrary, she harboured against him certain grudges caused by her wounded vanity, which remained dormant for the time being, but came to life when adversity overtook him.

The intimate relations of the Bonapartes were always marred by jarring disagreements and unpleasant jolts.

They all had the same nature as Napoleon, and though they did not openly attack, or break a lance with one so strong, they never lost an opportunity of warping him.

The sisters of Napoleon were resplendent in their luxury and in their inordinate pride, as they appeared in the extraordinary frame which the little gentleman of Ajaccio had fashioned for his family.

The Empress Joséphine was ever elegant in her autumnal beauty. She had an insatiable love for jewellery, costly lace, and lavish dresses, in a word, for all that goes to adorn and beautify the person of a woman. She wore her clothes with the utmost taste, especially the sumptuous garments adopted on State occasions. Her hair was adorned with pearls and precious stones instead of flowers, and her bodice studded with diamonds generously revealed a beautiful neck and shoulders. She displayed her charms to the very best advantage. Hortense stood by her mother's side. Her tastes were more simple, but at Court functions she too appeared in costly and handsome raiment.

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In close proximity with the ladies of the Imperial household, one beheld a legion of noblewomen whose names warranted their quality. They were easily recognised. Mme de La Rochefoucauld, daughter-in-law to the Duc de Liancourt, was a small woman bereft of elegance, but with a pleasant manner. There was plenty of life in her blue eyes, shadowed by black eyebrows, and her conversation was sparkling with wit. She thought she was conferring a great honour upon Bonaparte by consenting to administer the household of the Empress. She made a good investment of her time, having already obtained several Embassies for her husband, won back her own fortune which had been swamped by the storms of the Revolution, and married her daughter to the younger Prince Borghèse.

The feminine élite was composed of Mmes de Turenne, de Luçay, de Vergennes, de Ségur, de Serrant, de Bouillé, de Périgord, de Beauvau and de Noailles. Motives of personal interest or fear had brought all the nobility to the Imperial Palace. Those aristocrats who held aloof at first soon submitted to the inevitable, urged no doubt by the natural desire to shine in the new firmament. It was the Dowagers who objected most to visiting the Emperor, until a few grey heads of the old régime made up their minds to bow before the new Sovereign.

Young and old followed in their wake, and soon none failed to answer the call. They did not all show the good grace of Mme de Montmorency. Some of them purposely held aloof from such persons as the Maréchale de Dantzig.

Later on, under the Restoration, they used to say: "We do not know these women, they are only Maréchaux!" They turned aloof from them and from the members of the regicide nobility who flocked to the Court of Napoleon, provided with deeds and credentials, the ink of which was barely dry.

They had to accept their fate, as their common

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Master had placed old and new titles upon an equal footing.

Madame Maret was conspicuous in this brilliant assembly, but severely afflicted by self-asserting pride since she had become the "Duchesse de Bassano." She was an object of keen interest to La Maréchale Ney, who, though intoxicated by her husband's military glory, was much more reserved and dignified. She was then a young woman of twenty-five, with pleasant features and a very timid manner, but possessing good conversational powers. She was in constant dread of the Emperor, and feared to attract his attentions lest he might question her.

The Duchesse de Frioul, wife of Duroc, was a dark and haughty-looking Spaniard of the ordinary type. Madame Regnault de Saint-Jean d'Angély was far more attractive. Her profile was remarkably pure and she displayed it to the best advantage. She avoided facing her friends, as she knew that her statuesque and Grecian features were most admired sideways. In subdued tones she would indulge in criticism at the expense of Madame Récamier, but she made it quite clear that the brilliant success scored by her rival never eclipsed that achieved by herself. She implied that the contrary was the case :

"I was often seated in a *salon*, busy charming and captivating my hearers when Madame Récamier appeared. The brightness of her eyes, which were rather small, and the dazzling whiteness of her exquisite neck and shoulders eclipsed everything and everyone. She was truly resplendent, but after a few minutes those present returned to worship at my shrine."

Such were the remarks to which she gave expression with a tone of perfect self-assurance. They were perhaps exaggerated, but the fact remains that she was much courted and complimented on her charming features and voice. Madame Regnault de Saint-Jean d'Angély never failed to sing in her friends' drawing-

rooms, even when they forgot to ask her to oblige them with a song.¹

The ladies of the palace moved freely among the guests. They were not always recognisable, as the title of Lady-in-Waiting had been conferred upon a great number of foreigners who only resided in Paris during the Court season which lasted two months. They were mostly Italian ladies, exquisitely dressed, who looked both ingenuous and estranged in the midst of their new surroundings. They call for no further comment.

Among the French ladies belonging to the Empress's household were Madame de Mortemart and Madame de Montmorency. Their ancient names and titles were particularly grateful to the Emperor, who boasted of his liking for the old nobility.

Mesdames de Talhouet, de Lauriston, and de Colbert were ladies endowed with sterling qualities and charming commonplace natures. Mme de Rémusat must have been the most brilliant of them all, for it was she who always arrested Talleyrand's attention.

He enjoyed the conversation of this talented and witty woman. He appreciated her natural charms, her keen powers of observation and her liveliness, all of which tended to make her the most popular hostess in Paris. So flattering and enduring was the impression she produced upon him, that it haunted him while he discharged his State duties. Of this he was pleased to give her proof himself.

As Vice-Grand Elector he was presiding once over a meeting of the Senate. While waiting for the result of a vote, he whiled away the time by sketching a portrait of her upon a blank sheet of paper under the supposed name of Clari. He had forgotten neither the physical nor the moral attractions of his model. As the ballot had been taken before he had finished his sketch, he

¹ Madame de Cavaignac, *Memoirs of an unknown Woman*.

decided to do so during the elections of the following year.

It was Madame Rémusat who had fostered the intimacy between Talleyrand and her husband. This was common knowledge which did not at all please Napoleon, who tried more than once through sheer jealousy to sever the friendship between the Lord Chamberlain and the First Chamberlain. He resented the fact that any two members of his household should be on good terms with one another.¹

Madame de Rémusat was not exactly pretty, but she was decidedly attractive, thanks to her beautiful dark eyes, shaded by long eyelids, and to her pretty lips and dazzling teeth. The excessive breadth of her nose passed unnoticed, and her whole expression was one of tenderness and vivacity. She had become attached to Joséphine, who had bidden her to her side when she became the wife of the First Consul. She was appointed lady-in-waiting and her husband became Master of the Wardrobe and First Chamberlain.

The preparation of the Imperial uniforms was not a very difficult matter, but M. de Rémusat found that it was no easy task to organise the functions, receptions, and festivities of the Imperial Court.

Talleyrand thought that the man who had to amuse the Emperor deserved the greatest pity and he used to say to his subordinate, "*You have to amuse the un-amusable.*"

At first Mme de Rémusat was greatly interested in the Court theatricals. Her relations with Joséphine were full of amenity and sweetness when the jealous nature of the Empress was not awakened. The Emperor

¹ Those among them who chose to entertain more intimate relations than such as could be cultivated at official gatherings, were very careful to hide the fact from the Emperor. Fouché, for instance, would not have dared to tell him that he often visited Madame Murat. Napoleon loved to breed discord among his people, and to awaken their mutual distrust, thinking he would be best served when their interests came into conflict.

showed her every attention, which she appreciated, if not with her heart, at least with her imagination. She was impressionable, romantic, and fired by the Napoleonic glory. The qualities of this unique man hid defects that were as vast as those qualities. Gradually her ambition grew less. Experience and common sense enabled her to realise the ever-increasing abuses caused by an unruly and unmeasured absolutism. She buried her conceptions and deceptions in her innermost soul, and only expressed them in the presence of her relations, or of such intimate friends as Talleyrand. Joséphine remained silent in official Court circles. Her brilliant wit was a source of apprehension to her husband, and she was therefore accused of making great efforts to be witty. She observed, listened, and fed her memory, while recording with an easy pen the details of her daily observations, made with the greatest secrecy, and dictated by events and conversations.¹

Her great friendship with Joséphine afforded her every facility for judging men and matters with the greatest accuracy. Moreover, she was one of the few ladies-in-waiting with whom Napoleon deigned to converse. She has often related this herself, adducing proofs of what she stated.

Napoleon was not very hospitable towards his lady guests. He, the most imperious of men, always felt awkward in the company of women, and held them all responsible for this feeling, which provoked his anger. At his receptions he received them with the worst of grace.

“What is your name? How old are you? You say you are twenty-three and you are not married? Every girl should be married at twenty-three.”

¹ The first manuscript of Mme de Rémusat's *Memoirs* consisted of intimate letters, but was unfortunately consigned to the flames. During the Hundred Days, she feared that the Imperial Police might seize her correspondence, and thus compromise her whole family. She had to re-write from memory all that she had read, heard, and seen at the Tuileries, Saint-Cloud, and at Malmaison.

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He spoke to them as if they were soldiers, in fact, less kindly than if they had been. He often brought a conversation to a close by some unpleasant remark concerning themselves, their husbands, or the men who acted as such.

“ You are too thin, Madame ; your arms are red and puffed ; they are hideous.”

“ And you, madame, have you nothing else to wear but that grey dress ? ”

“ And you, do you mean to live and die in that yellow one ? Let me not see either of them again. I am sick of looking at them.”

He was convinced that he knew all about feminine dress. He often said so to Savary, and woe be to the women who happened to wear costumes which did not meet with his approval. As to their æsthetic beauty, he had a keen admiration for pretty hands and feet, and when he was disappointed he expressed his regret in very crude terms.¹ He only felt contempt for a sex that could not promote his own glory. A great change had supervened since the reign of Louis XV, when a new gown could determine the fate of France and the destiny of her Ministers. There were aspirants to his heart, such as La Vallière and Montespan, two beautiful women, but even they had soon to give up all hope of mating the man about whom his own wife said, “ The loveliest woman could not hope to mate him for more than two days in Egeria.” Young and charming women could at most attract his gaze at a Court function, when he had nothing else to do, but they were unable at any time to absorb his mind.²

¹ “ They have the fists of a butcher and the feet of a duck,” was a camp sentence which he applied to ladies afflicted with large or ugly feet.

² “ On no account shall I allow women to obtain influence at my Court. They did a lot of harm to Henry IV and Louis XIV, but my calling is a much more serious one than that of these Princes ; the French nation has become far too intelligent ever to tolerate a Sovereign who would advertise his liaisons or boast of titular mistresses.”

If they were not charmed by him, they certainly feared him. They were fascinated by his brilliant prestige, but awed by his rough and violent manner. He could not pay compliments. He was wilfully abrupt and took pleasure in hurling hurtful words which often tarnished the reputation of a defenceless woman or unexpectedly humiliated a man and compromised his position. He seemed pleased at displeasing others, as if the better to imprint upon their submissive souls the brand of their subjection. He acted very differently if he was in a gay and happy mood, and took the greatest pleasure in disconcerting women by extraordinary remarks to which they could not reply without blushing. At times he would inform one of them of their intimate relations with So-and-so, asserting that they were well known in their neighbourhood.

“As to you, Madame, you are not spared by the tongues of your neighbours, who are advertising your latest intrigue far and wide.” He was intensely gratified by the uneasiness he produced, and it is little wonder that one of his victims wrote: “Every woman in Paris was delighted and grateful to see him leave the room.” Sighs of relief greeted his departure.

With the exception of such rare diversions he was essentially a man of work, and the fashionable entertainments of the Tuileries afforded him no pleasure. He insisted that the High Dignitaries of State, the Ministers and General Officers, upon whom he had lavished gold, should entertain in a most generous fashion. It pleased him to know that the balls given by the Princesse Julie, the Princesse Borghèse, the Duchesse de Rovigo and the Duchesse de Vicence, vied in their magnificence with the last reception of M. de Talleyrand. He expressed satisfaction on learning that the dinners of Cambacérès or of the Duc de Gaëte had earned the great reputation afforded them. He wished the Tuileries to be resplendent on certain days; but brilliant and all as were his entertainments, they

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always seemed to be under the spell of the same influence which ever weighed him down, the influence of tedium.

Beyond the emotions produced by a great war or the majestic display of great public ceremonies, nothing could interest him. Everything was lassitude, weariness, satiety.

Referring to something or another, Roederer once said to him, "It is very sad, Your Majesty."

"Yes, indeed," he replied, "almost as sad as greatness."

This impression was not an assumed one. It was genuine, and it permeated his surroundings.

When supper was served in the Diana Gallery the fastuous setting of the tables and the dazzling luxury of the appointments and of the guests, lent extraordinary brilliancy to the vast and imposing picture. But true contentment and sincere pleasure, as revealed by a quiet and easy demeanour, were always absent from these gatherings, at which conversations were purely formal between the guests, who all seemed afraid to express their thoughts. The rare perfumes, the flow of light, and the strains of enchanting music were unable to counteract the heavy feeling of restraint which existed in these rooms.

Numerous stars twinkled upon the folds of costly garments. The flashes of diamonds and precious stones fell like a brilliant shower upon the shimmering gauze and satin. A beautiful sight indeed, thanks to all this munificence and all this display of glorious etiquette, but a frigid, sad, depressing feeling overcame those present. The ironical encouragements of the Chamberlains could not even provoke a smile. It was in vain that the Lord High Chamberlain exclaimed: "Ladies, you must be gay, for the Emperor commands you to amuse yourselves."

We have tried to describe this Court and this Society. We think we have proved that if the marvellous dictatorship of Napoleon was an unrivalled period for collectors of

trophies on the field of battle, it was also a very dull one for social life and for the moral government of women, for it did little to promote the exchange of thought and polite conversation which only find their being in peace and liberty.

CHAPTER X

IN THE WINGS AT ERFURT

Public opinion in 1808—First signs of opposition in the Emperor's surroundings after Baylen and Cintra—Systematic evolution of Talleyrand—A secret understanding with Austria, with a view to checking Napoleon's spirit of adventure in the East—Erfurt—The Mission of Prince de Bénévent—Conflicting policies of Napoleon and Talleyrand—How Prince de Bénévent secretly worked for the success of the latter, while entrusted with that of the former—The hostile part he played in Paris and his endeavours to restrain, even with the help of the foreigner, the breakneck ambitions of Napoleon—Intrigues and desertions at home during the Spanish campaign—Talleyrand's public reconciliation with Fouché—A conversation which was overheard—Napoleon's sudden return—The famous scene at the Tuileries—Disgrace of Talleyrand.

THE years 1805, 1806, 1807, witnessed such a phenomenal succession of amazing feats of arms that public imagination was completely dazed. The nation submitted to anything, transported as it was by admiration. The numberless families whose homes were left empty and deserted by compulsory conscription stifled their plaints. The populations of towns and countries were silent,¹ overawed by some superhuman fascination.

Ever since the first victories of the Revolution, France had been intoxicated by her unbroken success and attacked, like her leaders, by the fever of domination which at first sustained her and urged her forward. Thanks to the vigilance of the police and the official pressure brought to bear upon her, she was kept in a dual state of exaltation and narrow subjection, the trade mark of the Napoleonic dictatorship. While France still glorified in her docility, hypnotised by admiration and

¹ "The rights of the nation, of the people, and those of kings never agree so well as when the nation remains silent" (Cardinal de Retz).

by fear, the minds and souls of those within the palace had become more restive. Secret resistance and concerted plans, disloyal and therefore dangerous, were being hatched on the very steps of the Throne and defection was already rife in the oligarchy of State dignitaries.

The disintegration began at the zenith of Napoleon's prosperity, when he wielded such power that he considered all territories usurped¹ which had not fallen under his sway.

Before the peace of Tilsitt, while the cruel Conqueror trained his guns upon the frozen surface of the river, mowed down the fugitives of a broken army and ruthlessly contemplated thousands of his victims as they perished in the frozen waters, men of thought endowed with pity and common sense began to wonder what would be the end of such evils. Cold, calm and positive minds, unmoved by the pompous addresses dated on the morrow of a victory, inquired of one another when these phenomenal adventures would stop.

Decrès, the Naval Minister, said to Marmont, flushed with pride on receiving his Marshal's bâton: "You take a very bright view of things, but let me tell you the truth, the solemn truth: the Emperor is mad! A hopeless lunatic has been let loose in Europe. He will yet capsize the ship of State and every member of its crew shall sink." Talleyrand and Fouché had already exchanged their opinions and discussed their mutual fears concerning the infinite risks attending the Imperial policy. Together they studied the best means of minimising its ill-effects. Talleyrand had always dreamt of moderating a feverish and unbounded ambition and could ill resign himself to see it destroy and pulverise all the good that he had effected. While in charge of the Foreign Office, he boasted of having served Napoleon both faithfully and zealously. He hoped and prayed for two fundamental conditions which would have strengthened

¹ The same was said by Torcy of the Emperor Charles VI.

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and befitted a marvellous reign: the edification of monarchical institutions which, while guaranteeing the power of the Sovereign, would have maintained it within proper bounds; and secondly, the skilful handling of Europe, by which France might have been forgiven the possession of all her glory and her happiness.

He had ample time and opportunities to realise how fruitless were his efforts, how useless the system of diplomacy which he predicated when opposed by a despotic will that followed no plans save those which emanated from itself. He had become tired of doing barren work. His infallible foresight enabled him to look far into the future, where he could see the awakening from the most extraordinary dream the world had ever witnessed.

Napoleon's ruin was not yet at hand and Talleyrand could not serve any purpose by forsaking him. He was slow to relinquish the duties he had undertaken temporarily, but he demurely concluded that some day the Emperor would be unable to carry out any transaction in Europe, whose Kings and peoples he had outraged. He foresaw that the blockade, the losses sustained by industries garrotted by prohibitive tariffs and the wounds borne by nations through his exactions and violations, must inevitably be followed by some sudden and terrible explosion. To avoid being taken by surprise, he began negotiations abroad, hoping thus to find the means of pacifying France and the world, even by the help of her enemies.

Since such was to be the eventual issue, he had trained himself to think that he might perhaps hasten it. He undertook questionable negotiations with a view to overthrowing a jealous and oppressive authority, if it did not consent to be circumscribed. He realised that additional proofs of hostility would soon confront Napoleon with increased strength. He hoped to succeed in making him adopt more moderate measures, which would enable him to preserve his conquests rather than extend the field of his operations and expose him to the

risk of losing everything by so doing. In a word, he wished the Emperor to abandon his exclusive policy and to think of France more than of himself.

Talleyrand's views had been endorsed by Fouché and other dignitaries who, being provided with wealth and positions both exalted and lucrative, could better appreciate the benefits conferred by peace. The Emperor had gravely overrated the help he could expect from Prince de Bénévent. On learning the capitulation of Baylen, a serious reverse for his army, he had asked him to entertain most lavishly the Ministers, State Councillors, and Members of the *Corps Législatif*, whose good-will he was to foster and whose loyalty he was to kindle. This was at a time when the Vice-Grand Elector was actually preparing an insidious and treacherous resistance against the Chief of the Empire, feeling that its final results would atone for the questionable means by which it was achieved.

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On the morrow of Austerlitz, Napoleon had spoken these proud words to his soldiers :

“ We must finish this campaign by a clap of thunder. If France can only secure peace by accepting the conditions proposed by the Envoy Dolgorouki, she will not do so, even in the presence of a Russian army on the heights of Montmartre.”

He thought that this was an inflated hyperbole, because he had mentioned an impossible conjecture which could never become an accomplished fact. Yet those same armies which he had broken up and dispersed were to concentrate again and camp victoriously upon the heights of the French capital, where, at Belleville, Napoleon's messenger offered Alexander his acceptance of such peace as the Czar might choose to dictate.¹

¹ *Memoirs of Madame de Rémusat*, vol. ii.

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Frederick the Great used to say that forcing the hand of happiness entails its loss and that he who always yearns for more than he possesses can never be a happy man. Prince de Bénévent had often repeated this in other words to Bonaparte who consistently refused to listen to him.

Metternich, who ever hoped to see his country resuscitated, nurtured the same opinions as Talleyrand, who was already convinced that sooner or later this gigantic construction was bound to totter, fall and perish for the want of a basis. He was also aware that many causes still unknown, but whose results were certain, would help to bring about one of those historical cataclysms which follow great usurpations and obliterate all traces of Conquerors.

Prince de Bénévent began his work of occult and methodical destruction by conversations with Foreign Ministers, whom he informed that the French nation shared his views, was tired unto death of the Emperor's conquests, and only wished to preserve that homogeneous part of her soil, the true national conquests which ensured to France a prosperous existence within her natural frontiers, "The Rhine, the Alps, and the Pyrenees." He added, "The French nation is civilised; the Emperor is not."

He sent the following statement to the Emperor Alexander through a trusted intermediary:

"My opinion is shared by all wise and enlightened men."

The Tzar often repeated this to Romantsof, his Minister. Metternich was still diplomatically suspicious and personally mistrustful of Talleyrand, but the latter informed him that French diplomacy would favour the policy of Austria in a pacific sense.

The antagonism between the Emperor's views and those of his surroundings had now become acute.

He had not given up his dreams about the East, which he still yearned to reach. Talleyrand thought it would be both wise and prudent to bar his way and

stop him before he embarked upon this fresh adventure, by fomenting the opposition of Austria. He repaired forthwith to Metternich, whom he warned of the dread conflagration that threatened the confines of Eastern Europe. He suggested that Austria would not and could not consent to this, adding that she should obviate it at once in her own interest and for the sake of universal peace.

“We must become allies! Such will be the benefit accruing from the peace of Tilsitt. However paradoxical my theory may seem to you, the treaty places you in the most favoured position, because each of the contracting parties requires your aid in order to watch the other one. You must interfere as soon as possible, for in a few months no account will be taken of that which maintains you to-day in the position you occupy.”

The result of his efforts was surprising and unexpected. Metternich was wont to say that deft and subtle men like Talleyrand were sharp blades with which it was dangerous to play. He admitted, however, that great ills required drastic remedies, and he was prepared to try the one so appositely offered him by Prince de Bénévent. The Austrian Cabinet was naturally seduced by the prospect of becoming the arbiter of the Eastern question, after and in spite of Tilsitt.

Vienna was not sure that the advice had come from Talleyrand alone, for Metternich also professed to be an able diplomatist and a man of high principles. Besides, it might have been the Emperor himself who had conceived this manœuvre in order to stay the hand of Russia, ever eager to reach Constantinople.

On the 21st of January, 1808, the Austrian Cabinet informed Napoleon of the marriage of Francis II. It had just been invited by him to take a share in the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Talleyrand's views, however, travelled farther than a vague offer totally devoid of any intention. He endeavoured to prove this by soliciting a second and a third interview.

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He was most explicit at each of them. He was almost an ally, who, within the French Empire, was offering his services to the Hapsburgs for the common defence of a system directly opposed to the personal policy of Napoleon.

“I hate the idea of dismembering the Porte,” he said to Metternich, on the 25th of February. “I may even tell you that such an action would in no way tally with my political principles, but nothing can deter the Emperor from pursuing it. Bear this truth in mind, hold it for certain, and advise your Court to endorse my views. Were I Emperor of Austria, I should repeat the words of Frederick II to the King of France: ‘Not a cannon shall be fired in Europe without my leave.’ This is how you can maintain your national status and emerge victoriously from a struggle which has already cost so many lives.”

His warning was as clear as it was emphatic. Moreover, he was fully qualified to stiffen the courage of a Power weakened by a long series of defeats, but which had always remained under arms, ready to try again, hoping for better luck.¹

Talleyrand's exhortations were heard and acted upon. From Austria he turned to Russia. Invoking the interests of peace, he strongly advised the Tzar not to accept Napoleon's promises or to yield to his wishes without due reflection. Alexander had become suspicious by then, and his feelings towards the French Emperor had changed considerably. Ensuing events covered a far wider field than that contemplated by Talleyrand. It had been his wish to construct a double wall, consisting of a neutral Russia and a strong

¹ In 1799 Austria sought her revenge for the peace imposed upon her in 1797. The result was Marengo. This was followed by further efforts, which failed in 1805 at Ulm and Austerlitz, and four years later at Wagram.

On the 6th July, 1809, the Emperor Francis said to Metternich: “We shall have much to do in order to repair the harm that is done.”

Neither the Emperor nor his Minister had forsaken the hope of winning the day after so many sacrifices.

Austria, against that system of conquest of which destruction and artificial construction were the recurring consequences. His one object was to prevent Napoleon from pursuing a policy of adventure in the East, but his intentions of moderation caused terrible complications.

Austria forthwith adopted military precautions so as to be prepared at a moment's notice. The Vienna statesmen did not want to provoke a military conflict. They had bitter recollections of the results of 1806 and they were decided that this time their action should be dictated by more prudence and more skill. Napoleon was to be allowed to start on his campaign and Austria was to feign to take part in it; but as soon as he was in difficulties, the Russians and Austrians were to fall upon the common enemy, to whom they would dictate their terms, after seizing strong positions and surrounding the French Army. Napoleon's foresight thwarted this plan, which afforded a fine example of "*Fides Punica*."

Napoleon was surprised and annoyed to find that Austria had strengthened her first line of defence by doubling her effectives and by forming a national militia which yielded strong and valuable contingents. He asked Metternich for an explanation, feeling that a trap was being laid for him. "Is it by arming yourselves to the teeth that you want to be my partners in Turkey? If so, you are gravely deceived, for I shall never allow myself to be imposed upon by friendly Powers, nor shall I ever treat with a Power that tries to impose upon me."

Having hurled this threat, he adopted a calmer tone of persuasion. He hesitated before taking a final decision, as he felt that this was the key to his whole destiny.

It was Talleyrand who had caused this critical phase in the hope of compelling him to check his ambition, but he had not reckoned, as he should have done, with the violent and irritable temper of the great

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man. Instead of cultivating patience, Napoleon gave full vent to his ire. He was indeed the impulsive warrior who declared that he would *bastinade* Austria,¹ heedless of the consequences that might follow his words.

On the 15th of August, 1808, he had mastered his feelings and said to Metternich, as he trembled with rage: "You see yourself how calm I am."

The next day he said he would smash Austria and scatter her limbs to the four winds, leaving two Empires only in Europe, France and Russia, giants ready to jump at each other's throats whenever circumstances compelled.

Things were spoiling towards the North. The famous Anglo-Russian alliance, though brand-new, was already severely shaken. Count Tolstoi, Russia's representative in Paris, assumed such stiff airs that Napoleon demanded his recall. Russian society displayed great ill-will towards France; and it was asserted in Petersburg that there were only three Slavs in favour of this alliance, Alexander, the Chancellor Romantsof and Speranski. There were many other indications of the lack of sympathy towards the French nation on the banks of the Neva. The Czar had grown very cool towards an ally whose actions had wounded his convictions. All these upheavals in Europe, the successive dethronements of the Kings of Sardinia, Naples and of the Bourbons of Spain, the expulsion of the House of Braganza, the forcible removal of the Pope from his Metropolis, the indefinite extension of the Confederation of the Rhine, which now reached beyond the Elbe and passing through Mecklenbourg and Lubeck had got a footing on the shores of the Baltic; and, above all, the powerful organisation of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, were so many culminating points in a series of transformations and

¹ "I will thrash Austria with a stick," he said to Count Romantsof, the Russian Minister, who replied: "Sire, I hope your blows will not be too heavy, for otherwise we should be compelled to count the bruises" (Romantsof's letter to the Emperor Alexander, 30th January, 11th February, 1800).

aggrandisements in which he had had no share. For these reasons, the Tzar felt that he had been duped. What had come of the assurances given at Tilsitt? There were no more offers of a positive nature, no more proposals to share spoils in the East!

Alexander began to show his dissatisfaction, and stated boldly that he was anxious to reach Constantinople.

The trend of events was most unfavourable in Spain and Austria had begun to arm in an ominous way.

Napoleon felt it necessary to come into closer contact with his ally, to cloak him once more with his prestige and dazzle him by fulsome promises. In exchange for all their friendship displayed by gestures and by words, he meant him to ratify the threat recently made by Russia to the Austrian Minister. Alexander would join hands with Napoleon if it was necessary to bring Austria to her senses. In order to obtain from the Tzar a complete proof of the harmony of their sentiments and policy, he informed him of various concessions which he was prepared to make and which would be worth more to him than the fruits of many victories, as he could obtain them without the loss of one soldier. He arranged to meet him at Erfurt, with a view to converting him to his way of thinking.

Before starting he sent for Talleyrand, who was to accompany him, together with Berthier, Champagny, Maret, and Tolstoi, the Ambassador. The Prince entered the palace one evening by the general entrance, but as soon as the Emperor saw him in the reception-rooms he led him to his study.

“ Well, how do you think I managed the Tzar, now that you have had access to the whole Russian correspondence? ”

Without waiting for a reply and without suspecting that he discounted the approval of his Minister with undue haste, he proceeded to recapitulate all he had said and written during the past year. He boasted

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of the ascendancy he had gained over the Muscovite autocrat, while only giving effect to such clauses of the treaty of Tilsitt as he deemed fit.

“Now, my dear Talleyrand, we are going to Erfurt, whence I wish to return free to do what I choose in Spain, with the certainty that Austria will be kept in a state of continual anxiety. Moreover, I do not mean to enter into any formal arrangements with Russia concerning the East.”

Two days later the Prince brought him the draft of the treaty, the terms of which had been suggested by Napoleon who approved of the text while reserving the right to insist upon the severity of his future attitude towards Austria.

“You have remained somewhat Austrian, I see.”

“Somewhat, Majesty, but I think it would be more accurate to say that I have never been a Russian and have always remained a *Frenchman*.”

“Prepare for the journey, then, and while you are away, do not lose an opportunity of seeing the Emperor Alexander. You know him well, and can therefore hold most useful conversation with him.”

Talleyrand carried away Napoleon's secret, together with his own, which he had not confided to his Master. Between times it was his duty to sound Alexander as to a possible alliance which might be cemented by the marriage of Napoleon with a Russian Princess.

We shall see how he fostered this plan, the success of which he had good reason to fear, as it would have upset his whole political policy. He had been given two days' start of Napoleon, so that he might attract to Erfurt the Sovereigns whose presence was desired there. His instructions were ambiguous. This was generally the case with Napoleon. First of all it had been suggested that Prince Eugène de Beauharnais should undertake this task, but it was eventually decided that he could not have achieved condign success, as he had not the gift of persuasion possessed by Talleyrand.

Prince de Bénévènt was to group around him as many Princes as possible, and to insinuate that the Emperor would be very pleased to receive them. The tune was changed when they were assembled. Napoleon showed his supreme indifference to their presence, stating that he would always have more Kings around him than he needed, that they were in his way and hampered him in his important work.

On the 28th of September the proud Sovereign suddenly left Paris for the interview at Erfurt. The seductions of Tilsitt were resorted to once more, in the midst of fastuous entertainments and of social functions. The staging of the play was unrivalled in its luxury and exquisite disposition.

The Emperor had constantly repeated these words to Rémusat and Talleyrand :

“ I wish my journey to be effected with the most brilliant display possible. Whom have you appointed as assistant Chamberlains? For these posts I must have men bearing the oldest titles of France. This is due to the French nobility, an invaluable body for Court performances. Each day I shall want a stage play, chosen among the masterpieces of the *Comédie française* and interpreted by its best actors.”

His military escort consisted of Field-Marsals and full Generals, all the bearers of famous names. In a word, this demonstration of his power was overwhelming, and excited the jealousy of the one in whose honour it was supposed to be made.¹

He relied upon the captivating manners of the Prince and felt sure he would soon regain his influence. It was the Lord High Chamberlain who had to do the honours of the Imperial Court to the legion of Kings and mighty

¹ Russian pride was sorely wounded by it. Turguenieff wrote :
“ I could see my country lowered in the person of its Sovereign and it was useless to inquire into the proceedings of the Cabinets of Europe. One could see at a glance which of the two Emperors was the Master, both of Erfurt and of Europe.”

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lords who composed the suite of the two arbiters of the world.

“Prestige will not be lacking,” said Napoleon to Talleyrand.

Surrounded by his military escort, he went to meet Alexander, as the salvoes of artillery and the pealing of the bells rent the air. The streets were crowded to suffocation. Sumptuous equipages and prancing horses filled the little German town, which had almost become French by the presence of him who really owned it. It had become a princely residence, and was transformed beyond recognition by the Parisian luxury imparted to it. There were gathered the Sovereigns of Saxony, Wurtemberg, Bavaria and all the reigning Princes who constituted Napoleon's Court, when the Tzar Alexander arrived, fired by juvenile impatience. Napoleon carefully observed the facial play upon the face of his northern friend and was satisfied that he had created a favourable impression in his enthusiastic soul. The first greetings were decidedly friendly. This could be read upon the anxious features of Baron de Vincent, whom the Vienna Cabinet had sent to Erfurt as a diplomat and an observer. Once more Alexander was enchanted. Napoleon had obtained access to his heart by the intimate way in which he confided to him one morning that he was only too eager to relinquish his strenuous work and indulge at last in the supreme joys of a family life. But, alas! he could not satisfy his taste.

“How could I attain my object?” he said with emotion. “My wife is my senior by ten years, and will never bear me children whom I can shape, fashion and love. I beg your pardon for referring to such matters. It was ridiculous of me to do so, but I yielded to the dictates of my heart, which pours its woes into your heart.”

During the whole of that day Alexander remained under the spell of his charming conversation. That evening he repeated it to the Princess de Tour and Taxis.

"Nobody really knows the true character of this man, who is compelled to do things which set Europe by the ears. You have no idea of his goodness."

Turning to Talleyrand, he added: "Such is your opinion, is it not?"

"Majesty, I have good reasons to think so, and am always prepared to state them," was the diplomat's reply.

Alexander was, however, much more reticent on matters of State policy.

When Prince de Bénévent informed Napoleon that the Tzar was delighted, this practical man replied: "If he is so fond of me, why does he hesitate to sign? Besides," he added, "there is no hurry. We are so delighted to meet that we had better enjoy ourselves awhile." The previous day he had whispered to Talleyrand: "I think the Tzar will do what I choose." It was his conviction that Alexander shared all his views, that he could speak in his name as if it were his own, that Russia would follow him blindly, and would support him in all his undertakings.¹ He was so confident of the good effect produced by the display of his greatness and his power that he postponed the discussion of all definite subjects, such as his wish for a complete *entente* or the anxiety caused him by Austria. Nor did he mention the East, Constantinople or Egypt. The interval had lasted long enough to allow of preliminary interviews and public functions. It was high time to broach the main questions. The recent murders of Selim III and Mustapha IV afforded a good ground for the resumption of the programme, the clauses of which had been glanced at but not agreed upon at Tilsitt. A wonderful future was at hand once this close alliance was effected. It would lay the foundation of two Empires, the Eastern and the Western, which would rule the world!

¹ This was what he confidently wrote to his brother Jérôme: "It is perfectly clear that as soon as the Emperor of Austria moves he will have ceased to reign, for Russia and France have never been on better terms."

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Great ideas and gigantic projects once more filled the mind of Alexander. But he did not conceive the impression that was expected. By waiting too long, Napoleon had overshot the mark. His system of demure logic, enforced on this occasion only, was not successful. Alexander had latterly balked the issue, avoiding the subjects most pregnant with interest for his future ally. When Napoleon decided to discuss the share of the spoils, it was too late, for Talleyrand had come between Alexander and himself. The harm was done. The astute statesman had convinced the autocrat of the North that he would be best served by time and circumstances. He added that he had received Napoleon's private instructions concerning the way in which he was to shape negotiations and the end that was to be achieved with Alexander's concurrence. He quoted Napoleon's words:

“The most important clause of this treaty is that against Austria.”

Talleyrand was intent on safeguarding the integrity of Austria, deeming it indispensable to international equilibrium. For once M. de Talleyrand showed very little regard for professional secrecy. He was most expansive with Alexander. Having preceded Napoleon by forty-eight hours, he was entrusted with the preliminaries of the Erfurt Conference, and lost no time in trying to render it abortive. His reason for this was quite valid in his opinion. He wanted to hinder the destruction of Europe which he had already begun to avert.

At first Alexander was on the *qui vive* with the Prince. He queried his honesty and thought he had good reasons for so doing. He might have declined to confer with him at all but for the intervention of the charming, sincere, and much-deceived Caulaincourt.

Talleyrand's confidences had interested him keenly. He approved of his policy, little suspecting that the crafty diplomat was preaching the same gospel at Vienna. The trick was thus successfully played.

The two men to whom Napoleon had entrusted his secret agreed to betray it. Caulaincourt had gone to meet the Tzar at Weimar and had spoken often and well of Prince de Bénévent, his bosom friend, who met Alexander at the Palace of the Princesse de Tour and Taxis. The statesman did not falter in attacking the subject. He went straight to the point, without urging Napoleon's plans.

"Majesty," he said to the Tzar, "what have you come here for? You must save Europe and that can only be done by resisting Napoleon with all your might."

What could have been cleverer than to forge for himself the part of a superior judge by offering Alexander, the arbiter and master, the best advantages at the lowest cost?

He knew that Napoleon's Eastern policy shed gleams of light and was enhanced by gilded clouds which could arrest the young Emperor's attention, but he also knew that the same policy contained many shoals and pitfalls. The result of these would inevitably compel him to sever himself from Austria and thus leave a clear road for Bonaparte. The alternative to all this was the peaceful and able policy of Talleyrand, resting upon the sound basis of an indispensable counterpoise to the top-heavy power of the Western autocrat.

The Tzar should effect his purpose by a concerted action with the Hapsburgs, whose help would enable him to close the doors of the East against Napoleon, his ally of to-day and his competitor, if not his enemy, at no distant date.

The policy which Talleyrand was instructed to promote could not have been more efficiently checkmated. It is true that the pursuance of that same policy must have caused grievous trouble in Europe. By amusing Russia, by lulling her to sleep with phantom promises and by proceeding to reduce Austria to the same condition as that of Prussia, Napoleon would have been left with one rival only, the Monarch of all the Russias, whom in turn he would have brought into subjection.

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The crafty diplomat insisted that the Tzar should agree with him upon the urgent necessity of nipping in the bud a number of cruel wars born the one from the other and all the natural results of Napoleon's policy.

Talleyrand had succeeded beyond his dreams. Alexander's eagerness to reach the East had suddenly vanished. He informed Napoleon that he thought it wiser to postpone negotiations until they could be resumed in a calmer and more peaceful atmosphere. Shortly afterwards he sternly refused to lend an ear to the Emperor's Eastern proposals and his wooer ceased to dazzle him with tempting offers.¹

Talleyrand had every opportunity of carrying out this plan. He spent the day with Napoleon and repaired each evening to the residence of the Princesse de Tour and Taxis to meet the Tzar. He did not consider that he was betraying the Emperor from any personal motive, but he felt he was performing a duty by upholding a policy of permanent conquest and agitation which could not be defended.

Napoleon had been all the less fortunate in the choice of his officious representative at Erfurt, as he was somewhat poorly served by the credulous General de Caulaincourt, his official Ambassador at the Court of the Tzar.²

In the secret articles prepared for the signature of the Tzar, he had insisted upon including the most stringent clauses with regard to Austria. Talleyrand hastened to assure the representative of the Viennese Cabinet that he would use every effort to protect the interests of Austria at Erfurt. Napoleon urged him to obtain the Tzar's signature, while Talleyrand said to Alexander: "Do not sign in a hurry." At last the treaty was signed. It confirmed that of Tilsitt and guaranteed the neutrality

¹ Report No. 12 from Caulaincourt to Napoleon, 15th February, 1809 (National Archives, A.F. iv., p. 1698).

² Caulaincourt corresponded regularly with Talleyrand until the end of Napoleon's reign. He knew nothing of the secret relations of Prince de Bénévent with the Russian and Austrian Courts (*Napoleon and the Emperor Alexander I*, by Albert Vandal).

of the Continent during Napoleon's operations in Spain. As a reward for this the Tzar was allowed to annex Finland and the Provinces of the Danube to the Russian Empire.

Alexander had returned to Petersburg, having secured possible advantages at a very small cost, while Napoleon proceeded, as he thought, to effect the conquest of Spain. Once more they embraced, swearing eternal affection, the germs of which were not in their souls. Henceforth they were to meet as enemies, sword in hand.

Talleyrand returned to Paris convinced that he had secured the peace of the world. He had counteracted the effects of the Franco-Russian alliance and brought Alexander and Baron de Vincent together on the eve of the Tzar's departure. The Austrian Minister was beaming with delight as he left the presence of the Russian Sovereign. Talleyrand had furthermore secured a sort of family arrangement with the Tzar by obtaining the hand of Dorothée, Duchesse de Courlande, for his nephew Edmond de Périgord.¹

He had reassured Austria to such an extent that she began to arm for another campaign.²

Napoleon was not as satisfied or as confident as he could have wished, on his return from Erfurt. He did not consider his journey the complete victory he had hoped for, but a partial defeat. The Emperor of Russia had not enforced the disarmament of Austria with sufficient energy and the time had not yet come when Bonaparte could hurl the whole of Europe against England.³ As he rushed through France, on his way to conquer Spain, he had noticed certain signs and symptoms of anxiety and secret agitation. In his immediate circle he observed other signs of a sullen, mys-

¹ We shall have much to say about the Duchesse in our next volume.

² "Talleyrand says that we must not be taken unawares by Napoleon if he means to wage war against us" (Metternich's reports).

³ *Napoleon and Alexander*, vol. i. (Albert Vandal).

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terious hostility. His plans were once more threatened by a possible foreign coalition.

Austria had recently been talking in very loud tones and he wondered who could be prompting her.

Napoleon's irritation knew no bounds. In vain he tried to explain the total failure of his most secret and best-devised plans. In vain he endeavoured to understand how it was that every hitch in his policy made for the good of his adversaries. Could Talleyrand's hand have done this work? He suspected it and before long his suspicions were confirmed by the written denunciations that reached him.

Since the Emperor had crossed the Pyrenees and advanced on Madrid by forced marches, Talleyrand took no trouble to disguise his bitterness and discontent. He stated publicly that this mad adventure would have the direst results and that the vengeance of the Spaniard would overtake the Emperor himself. He predicted the early vacancy of the Throne of France and the necessity to fill it as soon as possible. He did not so much blame the expedition in itself, having almost encouraged it at the start, though he afterwards denied ever having done so.

There was nothing more convenient for the permanent foundation of the Napoleonic dynasty than to expel that of the Bourbons. But why all this treachery? Why these tricks and ruses? Why not have declared a war, which could easily have been justified?

The Spanish nation would have remained neutral in such a war. Intoxicated as it was by Napoleon's fame, it would have witnessed without the slightest regret the downfall of an effete dynasty.

"After a few engagements feebly fought by the regular army, the whole peninsula would have gladly come under the sceptre of a house which had gloriously replaced in France the one which had given Philip V to

Spain. Thus the whole inheritance of Louis XIV could have been recovered.”¹

These words did not express his whole thoughts, for he did not wish to contradict, to gainsay too openly, certain concessions which he had made upon this subject to the Emperor, in a spirit of submission and complacency.

After the Samo-Sierra affair he had written a letter to Napoleon which must have reached him as he entered Madrid. (Pasquier had this letter in his possession in 1829.) In it he expressed the hope that the Emperor's occupation of the Spanish capital, at the head of his troops, would soon bring about the disarmament of Spain.

He expressed very different opinions among his own group. He knew every detail of the comedy enacted at Bayonne, and callous though he was, that incident filled him with indignation. He said to Count Beugnot: “Victories can never wipe away such stains. They bear the imprint of villainy, deceit and trickery. I dare not foretell the result of it all, but you will see that the Emperor will be forgiven by no man.”

He spoke openly in this sense to those with whom his views had great weight, so much so that La Vallette, an aide-de-camp of the Emperor, deemed it his duty to inform his Master of the fact. He added that Fouché and Talleyrand were friends once more and that they shared the same views.

Then came the episode of the visit of the Dowager-Empress to the Princesse de Vaudemont, during which Madame-Mère overheard a conversation between the Lord Chamberlain and the Minister of Police.

What afterthoughts or machinations could have united these two men whose mutual hatred had been so intense? Their antagonism had been common knowledge. Talleyrand had felt jealous of Fouché,

¹ Talleyrand's Memoirs.

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although he did not confess the fact as frankly as he did his profound contempt for the Duc de Bassano. Fouché had also good reasons to detest him and never lost an opportunity of lashing his rival with bitter and cynical remarks. He reproached him with an utter lack of conscience and good faith, truly a nice indictment, coming from such quarter.

Prince de Bénévent, a fine and haughty nobleman, had no sympathy with the late Jacobin. He despised his vulgarity, his loud and self-asserting ways and the pettiness of his feelings, but he admitted that in the game of politics vile natures and men bereft of conscience and of principles were often indispensable adjuncts to those who could use them at the proper time.

No one ever believed that these two men grew to like each other. Talleyrand had felt the keenest delight when Fouché was caught in the meshes which he had woven for others. He had used the incident of the infernal machine as a pretext for securing Fouché's dismissal. This did not prevent the latter from retrieving much more than he had lost.

When partial disgrace overtook Talleyrand in 1807, Fouché seized the opportunity of increasing his own power. Their past, their tastes, their education were dissimilar, but they were equally subtle and pliable in their acceptance of promotion from such form of Government as could afford them high and lucrative preferment. They were both too intelligent to waste time in fomenting the bitterness of a prolonged and acrimonious dispute, feeling the necessity for common action.

Before this extraordinary alliance was effected they had every opportunity of testing that ground over which they were to travel together. They questioned each other as to the value of their mutual help. They were brought together by Mme de Rémusat at a dinner-party, where one Madame de Rumford had to thank them both for some favour conferred. They had eagerly availed themselves of the opportunity and exchanged some very useful words before the evening was over.

The definite reconciliation was determined by Blanc d'Hauterive, whose powers as an orator had earned for him the friendship of Fouché, while his duties at the Foreign Office were rewarded by that of Talleyrand.

The world was suddenly apprised of the compact sealed between the former enemies. The surprise created was all the greater as they both seemed anxious to give the greatest publicity to their newly born alliance. The presence of Fouché at one of Talleyrand's receptions evoked the greatest surprise.

According to a witness, the guests could not believe their eyes as they saw them walking arm and arm from room to room during the whole evening. All were lost in conjectures and puzzled by the novelty of what they had recorded. The two statesmen were equally demonstrative at the house of Princess de Vaudemont one evening that Madame-Mère happened to be there. In the course of their conversation she overheard the following remark made by Fouché to Talleyrand :

“ He is a lunatic, and we must put an end to his vagaries.”

Both then proceeded to consider the condition of the general upheaval that must follow upon the death of Napoleon, and place either Murat or Bernadotte upon the throne. They eventually decided upon Murat as the Emperor's successor, because Fouché made sure that he could handle him, while Talleyrand was convinced that it would be much easier to overthrow him than to place him on the throne.

The following day the Empress-Mother sent a special messenger to Spain. The news which he bore coincided with Austria's declaration of war. Napoleon considered that the condition of affairs was so grave as to necessitate his presence in Paris. In six days he rode from Valladolid to Burgos, and travelled thence to Paris by post-chaise.

He had no outburst of temper on reaching the palace, but awaited the completion of the inquiry, which was

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being secretly held. Five days later, the brunt of the storm fell upon Talleyrand. The memorable scene occurred in the Throne Room, whither Napoleon had bidden Cambacérès, Decrès, the High Dignitaries of State and all the Ministers.

Fouché had been purposely kept away. The Emperor had postponed his dismissal, not wishing to disorganise his police on the eve of a campaign. For one long half-hour Napoleon gave vent to a torrent of abuse and insults more violent, says Chancellor Pasquier, than were ever heard in such a place or in such company. In the presence of all, he called Talleyrand a thief, a coward, a man without faith or honour. The flow of his invective seemed interminable. The statesman submitted to the insulting monologue, apparently unruffled, but every lash of Napoleon's tongue ploughed a deep furrow in his heart, into which fell the seeds of an implacable enmity. Talleyrand returned to the Court of Napoleon, and was reinstated among the High Dignitaries of the Empire, but that he never forgot the insult was duly proved after Leipzig.

The official organ of the Empire had announced that M. de Montesquiou had succeeded M. de Talleyrand as Lord High Chamberlain. This news was published before the angry scene in the Throne Room.

Stripped of his dignities, Talleyrand retired to his Castle of Valençay, where he had charge of the Spanish Princes. The Emperor's resentment had not gone so far as to send him to prison or into exile. Napoleon regretted this later, when nothing was left to him but the bitter memory of his bygone power :

“I made a grievous mistake. Having goaded him on to such discontent, I should have either locked him up or kept him by my side. It was certain that he would revenge himself and that a man of his intellect would easily realise that his vengeance would be best assured by the return of the Bourbons, who were then at my doors.”

Talleyrand was not the only cause of this quarrel.

The Sovereigns and the nations insulted by Bonaparte, crushed and alienated by him, were also active parties to it. Whatever might have been his treatment of Talleyrand, he could not have stayed the course of events.

CHAPTER XI

TALLEYRAND'S SECRET PART IN THE OVERTHROW OF THE EMPIRE

A busy period of inactivity—Talleyrand is summoned to the Council on the occasion of the Imperial divorce—The Austrian marriage and its results—Imperial difficulties at home and abroad—Termination of the Russian alliance—Talleyrand's remarks on the morrow of Moscow—The beginning and the end—Intrigues and plots conceived with a view to hastening the climax—Condition of France in 1813 as described in private letters—The counterblast of Leipzig—Talleyrand refuses the Emperor's offer of the portfolio of Foreign Affairs—The last days of the Empire—Prince de Bénévent's numerous visitors—Aimée de Coigny, Duchesse de Fleury, the Bourbons' Ambassadress—Her morning conversations with Talleyrand—His reasons for espousing the cause of the Bourbons—The Council of Regency—A last advice to Marie-Louise—How Talleyrand was able to remain in Paris to receive the Emperor of Russia as his guest in the Rue Saint Florentin, and thus become the most important statesman in France—His public work before his departure for the Congress of Vienna.

PRINCE DE BÉNÉVENT did not further compromise himself, but with a foresight sharpened by resentment he observed the symptoms of a coming change, as drastic as it was ardently desired. While imparting to his mode of life an air of indifference and inactivity, so cleverly assumed that the Emperor's suspicions were not even awakened, he continued his relations with Russia and with Austria. They had a double object. He knew that his disgrace had created a very bad impression in Petersburg, for Alexander was opposed to violent action. His moral nature was an amalgam of positive ambitions and philanthropic intentions, just as his intimate affections were both sensual and mystical. He felt every confidence in Talleyrand's ability to soothe embittered feelings, to

avoid provocation and useless vexations in the course of his negotiations, and to settle political differences without going to war.

The Tzar had recently advised Napoleon to send him to Vienna, where, with Romantsof, the Russian Minister, he might set forth with moderation and firmness the united intentions of the Courts of Petersburg and Paris.

The sudden dismissal of Prince de Bénévent had caused anxiety to the Tzar and his advisers, who saw in it the proof that the Emperor had forsaken all ideas of prudence and moderation. Alexander expressed his regret at this dismissal and wished it conveyed to Talleyrand. Discreetly, by means of the Russian Embassy, he sent a flattering and gracious message to him, which was not only evidence of his private esteem, but a direct invitation to remain in sympathetic contact with the friends that he had made. Nesselrode and Speranski became the intermediaries of the correspondence which ensued between Alexander and Talleyrand, under cover of the diplomatic valise. The Prince kindled the Tzar's fears and mistrust, and his personal influence had much to do in depriving Napoleon of the friendship of Alexander. Talleyrand followed the march of events as if he should be called upon to direct them at any moment. He studied the general situation and proceeded to forecast the date and nature of the coming catastrophe, seeking the best means of attenuating the misfortunes of his country. He was the only man in Europe who realised at this time that the end was near at hand.

Metternich was still spellbound by the defeats of the fifth coalition and in consequence his vision was greatly dimmed. In the following year he wrote: "Napoleon has obtained such a degree of power that he may well bridle his ambition. No human influence could attempt to do so with any measure of success."

A keen observer like the Maréchal Marmont thought he saw signs of weakness in the irritability and irresolution displayed by Napoleon; Talleyrand also thought that

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his will power was waning, but the Emperor's genius was at its zenith.

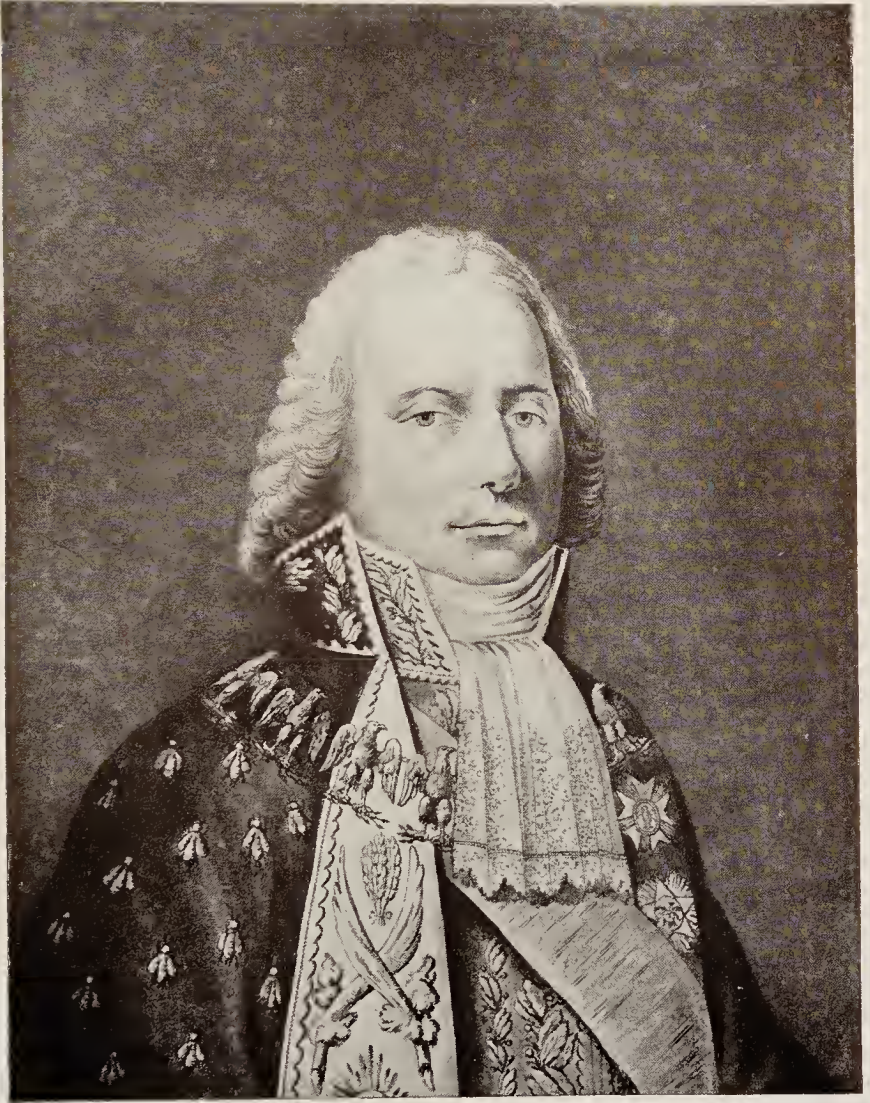
Austria had lost the dangerous game which Talleyrand had advised her to play in order to counteract Napoleon's rash adventures in the East. Badly seconded by his followers and by his ally, whose share had been one of passive connivance, Bonaparte had succeeded, after Wagram, in giving effect to this treaty of Vienna which was in reality a masterpiece of tactics. He now possessed those Illyrian Provinces, the objects of his ardent greed. They would afford him a road from Italy to Dalmatia, over which he could lead his armies to the very doors of the Ottoman Empire. One cloud obscured this splendid conception and cast some doubt upon the realisation of his dream. It was his fear concerning this phantom of an alliance, which he felt might slip through his fingers at any moment. He was not the only Master in Europe, a fact which he had good reason to prove in 1810, when the Tzar, ably prompted by Talleyrand, raised his voice incontinently and almost spoke as a superior to an inferior.

There were two questions at issue which increased the bitterness between Napoleon and Alexander. That of the division of spoils was rendered thornier by the Polish question, vicious in principle and almost impossible in practice.

The question of re-partition or division was the acuter, the ever-recurring stumbling-block and the determining cause of the final crisis, foreseen, if not fostered, by Talleyrand.

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Talleyrand had lost his Court position as Vice-Grand Elector, but he was still a member of the Council and not entirely cut adrift from public life. In 1810 he had to deal with the question of Imperial divorce. For some time past Napoleon himself had spread the rumour that Joséphine could not ensure the future of his



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dynasty, that in default of an heir Joseph Bonaparte was in no way fitted to succeed him, and that before long some solution must be found to this very grave question.

Fouché's police were active in circulating these statements. Journalists and paid poets had received private instructions from the Duc de Bassano upon the mode of writing with skill and moderation, while Berthier exhorted his Marshals to urge the Emperor to sacrifice his dearest affections upon the altar of duty. Napoleon feigned to consent, but betrayed much sadness. "He must be resigned, he said, since reasons of State and public interest compelled him to act. He considered that three houses of Europe were worthy to give an Empress to France: Austria, Russia and Saxony." He asked his Councillors to choose the alliance which they deemed likeliest to promote the interests of the Empire.

Thus was public opinion schooled and duly fashioned. In January, 1810, the principal Dignitaries of State were summoned to the Tuileries. They awaited the Emperor's communication in profound silence. In a faltering voice he stated that diplomatic reasons compelled him to break the union which had been such a happy one. Whither must he look?

"Arch-Chancellor, what is your opinion?"

Cambacérès expressed the wish that the Emperor should marry a Russian Grand Duchess.

This met with Napoleon's approval. Both at Tilsitt and at Erfurt he had nurtured this hope during the moments of studied expansion spent in the company of the Tzar.

In his eagerness to regain his influence upon Alexander, he had trusted to a matrimonial project as the safest method of achieving his end. So anxious was he, that he had decided to marry the Tzar's sister, taking her on trust with closed eyes and conferring full powers of appreciation upon Caulaincourt, his Ambassador. He did not boast of the uncertainty of these negotiations. Various pretexts, delays and postponements occupied

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more than two years, and could be interpreted as a refusal on the part of the Dowager-Empress. All this afforded ample proof that others had a voice in the matter besides Napoleon and that he might have had to wait a great deal longer. When Cambacérès had expressed his opinion, Lebrun gave the preference to the Court of Saxony. For this he invoked reasons of purely moral sympathy.

Murat and Fouché leaned towards the Russian alliance, and Prince de Bénévent concluded by treating the question from a very different point of view. He was at no pains to show that France's interests would be best served by an Austrian alliance. He was induced to give this advice by his keen desire not to contribute to the Emperor's interests or satisfaction. He took good care not to betray his inner thoughts, but defended his theory with arguments pertaining to State policy. He spoke of the European peace which would be the crowning of this marriage, but omitted to state that he was really pleading for the preservation of Austria. He was thus faithful to the traditions of Choiseul and to his own system.

Napoleon grew tired of listening to these different opinions and he adopted the one which was really unavoidable.

"All this is a political matter," he wrote to one of his Ministers.

The same view of the matter was taken at Vienna, and Francis II handed over his daughter, the State and Court "*Iphigénia*," to the Conqueror who had twice hunted her and her family from their capital and compelled them to beat a hasty retreat and wander homeless from town to town. Marie-Louise resigned herself to her fate. Being a good Viennese, she soon grew attached to her husband. Francis, her father, was pleased to behold the discomfiture of Russia. Talleyrand witnessed the Royal nuptials, the wonderful pomp, the excessive demonstrations of Metternich and the transports of imagination which treated Napoleon like a god.

When the festivities were over he returned to his daily study, that of the history of current events. Dispossessed of his titles, he was still M. de Talleyrand. Not a single distinguished foreigner passed through Paris without signing the visitors' book at his mansion "Infantado," which he had purchased in 1808 in the Rue Saint-Florentin, out of the moneys he made in Spain. His appearance and mode of life were not changed. Yesterday he was Lord High Chamberlain. To-day M. de Montesquiou held that office.

The only result of the change was that those who sought his favours had to drive a different way in order to obtain audience. Henceforth the jehus were oftener bidden to the Faubourg Saint-Germain than to the Faubourg Saint-Honoré.¹

With his usual serenity he fulfilled his duties and did not forget to show the respect due by a faithful subject to his Emperor and also to the two Empresses. Napoleon was sorry that he had sent him away. He had already said to him on the morrow of Erfurt, "We should never have parted."

From 1811 onwards he was confronted by the difficulties of his relations with Europe, which was conquered but not reduced to subjection. He was therefore compelled to avail himself again of the advice of the negotiator of Presbourg and Lunéville. He knew too well the value of this statesman's judgment. Even when he was most irritated and anxious to consign him to the fortress of Vincennes, he had sent for him and held one of those feverish consultations in which he betrayed the secret of some act which he was annoyed at having committed and upon which he sought Talleyrand's help. Talleyrand would join issue with him as far as possible and pronounce a judgment or offer an advice which, he knew beforehand, would never be followed. He would then retire as if nothing had happened between them.

¹ There were other changes, however, for the great office which he so enhanced by his personal dignity seemed to be stripped of its importance when it passed from the hands of M. de Talleyrand into those of M. de Montesquiou.

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Those who, besides Talleyrand, dared to give him advice were only capable of irritating him. At times he waxed furious against his brother Jérôme for having warned him that his greed for universal power would eventually seal his doom. But his attacks of choler did not prevent Europe from arming, or the clouds from gathering thick and fast around him.

The Spanish War was slowly but surely consuming the best material of the French Army. Prussia was preparing her great betrayal and raising troops for the purpose.

Germany was thrilled by the hope that she might have an early opportunity of shaking off her yoke.

Russia did not disguise her irritation, which was not caused so much by the improved relations between France and Austria as by the fear that a new kingdom, in the shape of Poland, might soon be created on her frontier.

England fanned the flames of these avowed or secret hatreds. The elements of opposition, ably directed since 1809 by Talleyrand and Fouché, now extended their ramifications to the very benches of the Senate. The far-seeing Prince had cultivated closer relations with his uncle the Cardinal, who became Grand Aumônier of Louis XVIII. Without writing or leaving any trace of a clandestine correspondence, he silently paved the way for a radical change. As early as 1811 he had predicted to his friend the Duc de Dalberg that all this would lead to the accession of a Bourbon. This superstition became a conviction when Napoleon crossed the Niemen and was buried in the depths of Russia. Saint Petersburg was not yet included in the list of his triumphant entries into the capitals of the world. When Talleyrand heard of the terrible fire of Moscow, he considered that Napoleon was a lost man, knowing as he did the audacity and imprudence of his nature.

We now come to the disasters of 1812. A pang of immense grief seized the French nation. It was then that Talleyrand pronounced his famous dictum, "This

is the beginning of the end." The Senate actually dared to murmur. The Opposition spoke out openly instead of ranting in the dark. Such Republicans as were left, began to reckon their units. Even the props of the Empire stated openly that its work must be begun afresh from its basis unless it were doomed for ever. There was still time to impart strength to an organisation which had been exhausted by the excessive strain imposed upon it. Hopes were born amidst the general mourning and those who were crushed with sorrow and despair wanted to live again. It was now known that the organisation was not invulnerable. Quite recently Napoleon's police¹ had found itself at the mercy of a sudden attack. Had Mallet been in possession of a sound plan, he might have sapped with one blow the military and civil power of the demi-god. Other conspiracies of a less daring nature filled the minds of drawing-room conspirators who thought themselves powerful and active agents. They dreamt of a Republic, a Monarchy, a Federation. They spoke very loudly because he was far away, but suddenly someone appeared who put a stop to their conversation. The Man of Destiny had returned without warning. He sprang from his travelling-coach on to his throne and resumed the sceptre at the Tuileries while the vast territory between the Bérésina and the Rhine was strewn with the wounded and the dead, who had once composed his vast army. Once more Talleyrand had to remain silent and to wait.

Napoleon had come back humiliated and embittered, subject to certain outbursts of anger and to great depression. He was no more the Master of events. He felt this, but sternly refused to believe that he could

¹ A very comical element was imparted to this dramatic incident of the Duc and Duchesse de Rovigo, which was related by Montrond to Talleyrand :

While one of the conspirators proceeded to arrest Savary, the Police Minister, his wife was seized with fright and rushed out of her room in a state of semi-nudity. Montrond added that the Minister of Police had betrayed great cowardice in hiding, but that his wife had in no way feared to show herself in her true colours.

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so soon become their plaything and their victim. He accused fate and those around him of all his misfortunes.

He had been betrayed by many, but in this sense Talleyrand was the worst offender. He thought of arresting the Grand Elector but had no proofs against him, and moreover, he feared the effects of such a drastic act which would have been as keenly resented in France as abroad. He tore up the warrant which he was about to issue. He had no time to waste in seeking the proofs of the treachery of his officials, for his whole attention was concentrated upon external troubles. It was high time to act, as public anxiety was growing apace. Napoleon left Paris, and once more the vehicle that bore him away was a chariot of war. 1813! What a year! What a period! France, exhausted and bleeding to death, still merged her cause and the sentiment of her glory into the personality of the Emperor, for it was only later that events were to afford her their philosophical and human teaching. She had been worn out, however, by twenty-two years of warfare. She had culled enough laurel wreaths steeped in blood and now she cried mercy! Was peace about to dawn upon the world? One might have hoped so after the victory of Dresden, when the firing of the contending armies suddenly ceased. Both sides had agreed to an armistice as the best means of securing general peace.

The aides-de-camp of the two head-quarters had been dispatched in various directions, together with carriages conveying a French officer and a Russian officer bearing identical instructions. At their bidding, sieges and engagements came to a standstill from the mouth of the Elbe to that of the Vistula. It was therefore hoped that the pacification of the Continent was but a question of hours and in consequence joy reigned once more in the homes of the absent ones.

This happy illusion lasted exactly forty days. The offers made by the Powers were haughtily rejected by Napoleon. After so many useless sacrifices he had

felt unable to abandon his Oriental dream. Although, he was offered the Illyrian Provinces, after the Russian campaign of 1812, he refused to make peace, still indulging in the fond chimera of dividing the world into two parts, one of which must be his. His decision caused grievous disappointment in the army and throughout France. His Generals and his officers had preserved their honour, but they had lost their faith. They faced the enemy because it was their bad fortune to have to do so, but they had no enthusiasm, convinced that they would soon bite the dust like the others. They felt they were doomed to fall under the cruel blows of fate.

“It will be our turn next,” was the invariable saying of those who had escaped from the last butchery. The bitterness which filled their souls was loudly re-echoed by their wives, their children, and their friends. We hold numerous letters which eloquently testify to the state of anguish of the whole nation. They express the one long cry of desolation, of hopeless despair, a cry that was soon bound to resolve itself into deeds.

The time was far away when young wives prayed that their ambitious husbands might conquer a harvest of glory, honours, dignities and obtain rapid promotion at the point of the sword. They now looked upon war as a calamity affording neither respite nor compensation. Wives, mothers and sisters trembled as they heard the postman’s knock. Joy and gaiety had ceased to exist for the women of France, who yearned for the morrow while fearing what it might bring. From every quarter came details of collective or individual sufferings and the minds could not rest with any satisfaction upon a single point of the horizon.

At home the brilliant official statistics were misleading as to the critical condition of commerce and industry.

“The Flanders are producing nothing, Paris very little, and Westphalia less than nothing.”¹

¹ Letter to General Baron Corbineau, aide-de-camp to the Emperor.

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The social and artistic life of Paris was at a standstill.¹

The Press had remained what it was, a daily record (severely edited) of the sayings, doings and actions of the Master. One would have sought in vain for an adverse criticism or an expression of opinion. The soul of the nation remained silent and paralysed and it seemed that it could only be awakened by a formidable catastrophe. Furtive and always alarming echoes related the events beyond the frontier. All letters bearing the Spanish postmark were confiscated by the postal authorities. The Government feared their baneful influence upon public opinion and also upon the price of Stocks. The Italian nation was pawing the ground and gnawing its bit, devoured by a fever of rebellion. Italy was overrun with brigands. Its financial condition was desperate and the armed robberies upon the highway were on a par with but no worse than the depredations committed by the Government officials who seemed intent upon ruining the country.

In Germany the rising had been general and every day brought news of some fresh act of treason. The princes, the demi-kings, the grand dukes who, answering Napoleon's appeal, had joined the Confederation in order to acquire an army, titles and territories, banded themselves together that they might preserve all these by fighting him. Such news as came from the theatre of war was painful in the extreme. The relentless way in which the combined armies of Northern Germany carried on the campaign reminded one of what Romantsof said of the Emperor to a Russian diplomatist: "We must wear him down."

Then came the three awful days of Leipzig. Listen to Arndt the German poet:² "Near Leipzig lies a field of death, basking in ferocious joy because of the torrents of tears it has caused to flow. Bullets rained like snow-

¹ Letter from Eugène de Boynville to Baron Sparre, of the Spanish Army.

² Arndt, *Die Leipziger Schlacht*.

flakes, and thousands ceased to breathe on the gory field of Leipzig.”

In his hours of trial Napoleon often thought of Talleyrand. He was overwhelmed by his immense disaster and feverishly endeavoured to collect the remnants of his broken army that he might cover the frontiers of France, now threatened by the invader.

He sent for Prince de Bénévent. Peace accompanied by sacrifices was the only solution possible. Talleyrand urged him to submit to it. He warned the Emperor that he was overrating the energy of the nation, which would not and could not second him in a useless and obstinate resistance to the inevitable. He added that His Majesty would be forsaken by all if he did not ward off the fatal issue at any price. He concluded by saying that a bad peace would never be so fatal as the continuation of a war which could not end in his favour.

Napoleon still hesitated. The Prince's voice recalled to him the memory of happier days. For the third time he offered him the Foreign Office, which he respectfully declined, and for the second time he said: “We should never have parted company, Talleyrand.” This time he pronounced the words with genuine emotion and sincere regret. The interview was a long one. Talleyrand listened to him attentively, as he described his failure in Spain and the untold difficulties of his present position. He spoke volubly and in a tone of superiority, as though he were still the undisputed Master of the universe. He could not admit the mistakes he had committed and was therefore unable to adopt such prudent measures as might have minimised their consequences. When he had spoken, he awaited Talleyrand's answer. “By the way,” said the diplomatist, “you speak to me as if there had been no quarrel between us.”

He replied: “I oppose circumstances to circumstances. Let us ignore the past and the future, and give me your advice as to the present.”

“Well, you can only come to one decision. You have

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made mistakes, you must confess them and, if possible, confess them nobly and generously."

Talleyrand proceeded to develop his train of thought. The Emperor of the French should forthwith declare that, having been chosen Sovereign by his people and elected King by the nations of the world, it was not his intention to oppose their wishes. He should explain that he had begun the Spanish campaign with the sole object of ridding the Spanish people of the unbearable yoke imposed upon them by an odious and hated Minister who was upheld and encouraged by the weakest of Princes, but that having studied the situation at close quarters, he had come to the conclusion that, notwithstanding the faults of their King, the Spaniards were faithful to his dynasty. Under those circumstances he, Napoleon, had no wish to oppose the national wishes of Spain, and was therefore ready to restore Ferdinand to liberty and to withdraw the French troops across the Spanish frontier.

Such an admission, followed by the execution of his promise, would do honour to Napoleon, whose power was still such that his condescendence could not be interpreted as cowardice by these foreigners who still hesitated to cross his frontier.

Bonaparte paced the room and did not interrupt the Prince. On hearing the word "cowardice" he stopped and, staring him in the face, gave vent to one of those explosions of frankness to which he yielded at times:

"Cowardice, did you say? What matters to me? I would have you know that I would be guilty of cowardice if it could serve my purpose. You may be sure that there is nothing noble or nothing vile in this world. I possess all the characteristics that make for power and can deceive those who think they know me. I tell you that I, Napoleon, am a coward, essentially a coward, and I swear to you that I would not feel the slightest repulsion at committing what the world would call a dishonourable action. My secret leanings, which

after all are those of the nation, and opposed to the airs of grandeur which I am compelled to assume, afford me infinite resources for tricking and baffling the world.

“ I must therefore consider whether your advice fits in with my policy and also whether you have given it to me in order to serve your own secret interests. Excessive confidence, indeed ! ” As he spoke these words, he indulged in what Talleyrand described later as a satanic smile.

Bonaparte could not imagine that under existing circumstances he would be afforded advice that was not fostered by some afterthought of personal interest.

The interview had no results. When it took place Napoleon could have secured peace with honour, had he been guided by Fouché and Talleyrand. After Leipzig, M. de Saint-Aignan returned from Frankfort with proposals which secured to France the Rhine as a frontier.

Napoleon pursued his fatal course. The year 1814 had begun, and the invasion of France was near at hand.

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Talleyrand had never received more visitors in his mansion in the Rue Saint-Florentin. He had many friends, anxious to tell him that the country could only be saved by his wisdom and his prudence. He lent a willing ear to these statements.

Louis XVIII now sent ambassadors to him and even ambassadresses to him. He instructed Madame Aimée de Coigny to see Talleyrand, whom he did not like, but from whom he expected much. It was in vain that he had really asked Barras and the First Consul to give him back his crown.

This diplomatic and feminine mission was an episode in Talleyrand's life, the details of which afforded a pleasant change from the haunting visions of war. Each morning the Prince received the daily visit of a

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woman, the messenger of a group yearning for his advice, his encouragement and his instructions. Her name was Aimée de Coigny, Duchesse de Fleury. She came to repeat to the great man the daily lesson taught her by the Marquis Bruno de Boisgelin, and committed to memory by her, with faith, hope and charity.

“ You cannot see M. de Talleyrand too often,” was the advice tendered by Bruno. Aimée de Coigny, Duchesse de Fleury ! Her name alone brought many reminiscences to his mind. She was born on the 12th of October, 1769, when the French aristocracy, the most brilliant in Europe, had just transformed its virtues into elegance. Her refined and complete education had been effected under the shadow of the Château de Vigny.

She was married at fourteen to a husband who was not fifteen, and she had therefore enjoyed an early experience of life. Her social successes had been interrupted by her imprisonment under the reign of the Terreur ; but an ideal prison romance linked her name to that of André Chénier in a ray of immortal glory. She regained her liberty by effecting a temporary alliance with Mouret de Montrond. Other conjugal events, and many liaisons of the heart and of the senses had made her acquainted with the pleasures of life. In a word, she would afford us a most interesting study, but it would lead us too far from the one under consideration.¹ She contracted the need to speak to him on all subjects at the house of Mesdames de Bellegarde, the beautiful and adventurous Bellegarde, and at that of the Vicomtesse de Laval. She had preserved that expression of beauty in which resided her power of attraction, and she still spoke with a seductive vivacity which, together with a remarkable power of thought and analysis, earned for her the greatest praises from her contemporaries. She was of an incredulous and sarcastic nature, endowed with sparkling wit. It has been said of Mme de Coigny that she synchronised the whole eloquence of Mme de Staël in a few cutting sentences.

¹ *Memoirs of Aimée de Coigny*, by Lamy.

She devoted the early morning to shopping and then to visiting Talleyrand.

She was always welcome and repaired straight to the library, where she was sure to find him surrounded by literary friends whose society he could enjoy.

We find the following note in Mme de Coigny's souvenirs :

“ I have never known anyone who could converse so charmingly in a library, that part of the house of a man of means and taste which Cicero has described as the ‘ Garden of the Soul.’ He had a way of his own of taking up his books, examining them with apparent negligence, replacing them and returning to them. He could speak of the living and impart grace and freshness to the sayings of the dead. Often he would complete the judgment he had just delivered by reading an extract from the works of the author whom he had judged.”

The Duchesse de Fleury long remembered Talleyrand's readings of the famous conversation between the Reverend Father Canaye, and Marshal d'Hocquincourt, a page of Saint-Évremond worth all the comedies and as pleasant and powerful as the best of Molière's plays. She had not forgotten that M. de Molé was a member of this circle, a grave, dignified, starchy man who never laughed lest he might compromise his dignity. (She added that he also feared to exhibit his bad teeth if he opened his lips.) Molé was a solemn individual whom she judged a heavy pedant on that morning when he wore the gravest expression in rooms filled to overflowing with the brightest and gayest of company. Talleyrand seldom laughed. In his case a smile was sufficient to express what he felt. When she was fortunate enough to meet him alone there was nothing frivolous in their conversation, no more question of Saint-Évremond, of Field-Marshal d'Hocquincourt, or Father Canaye. It was devoted to Bonaparte, to his outrageous despotism and to his insatiable ambition.

“ Do you know a remedy for all these evils ? Can you find one ? Does one exist ? ” asked Mme de Coigny.

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“ Our salvation depends upon his destruction.”

“ Well, to ruin him is our most ardent wish.”

He had not answered thus on the spur of the moment. The question was too precise, the enigma too obscure. It was on the following day that he spoke these words, as sharp and violent as his resentment.

He continued thus: “ This man is of no more avail for the sort of good that he could effect. His use of strength against the Revolution is henceforth needless, for those ideas and principles which he alone could combat have grown weak enough, and it would be fatal if they became extinct. He had destroyed equality. That is well, but we need liberty, we must have laws, and that with him is utterly impossible. He must now be overthrown. You know old servants of that same Liberty, Garat and many others. Personally I can reach Siéyès. We must rekindle in their minds the thoughts of their youth, and in the absence of the Emperor their love for liberty may perhaps be born once again.”

“ Do you hope for that ? ”

“ Not very keenly, but it is worth attempting.”

As he spoke thus, could Talleyrand foresee in his own interests something more than a monarchical restoration, his own work, under which he would be Prime Minister? Or did he share the opinion of his ardent admirer, who felt sure that when Napoleon left the stage, which he filled alone, Talleyrand was the only man to whom any nation which had been severely fashioned to obedience would ever submit. He was not definitely decided upon the return of the Bourbons in the face of a grave eventuality, the overthrow of Napoleon which he welcomed with all his heart and endeavoured to bring about with all his might. There were several solutions that presented themselves to him, a regency, the return of the legitimate party, or the accession of the junior branch. Before coming to a definite conclusion he preferred to see which of all these plans would best suit his own interests in accordance, so far as possible, with those of the French nation. Of one thing he was sure.



PRINCE DE METTERNICH

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France could enjoy no rest so long as the tyrannical power of Napoleon did not receive a fatal blow.

Full light has been thrown on this conviction by the records of the statesman's interviews with Mme de Coigny, the trusted messenger of the Royalist party. They describe the progression and changes of the diplomat's views. At the beginning they were as unsettled as the Emperor's vicissitudes and gradually grew stronger as his reverses increased in numbers. They assumed a definite form as soon as his downfall was duly proved :

"It seems a very long time since you have seen your friend M. de Talleyrand," said Boisgelin to the graceful emissary of the Bourbons.

She had interrupted her visits owing to the gravity of the circumstances, and knowing the variable nature of Talleyrand she dreaded meeting him in one of those moods which made him hate the sight of an honest mortal. At such times the differences between justice and injustice became blurred in his mind, for he had assumed what he called himself his serpent's skin.

She summoned courage, however, and knocked at his door. She came at an opportune moment and found him in a most gracious and amiable mood.

They spoke at first of the general grief and of the national misfortunes. The enemy was at the gate of Paris. Was it not wise to adopt some measures before a foreigner drafted laws in the capital of France? This was Mme de Coigny's query.

He replied briefly and in the tone which he adopted when he wished to close a discussion, that a Regency was the only thing he could contemplate. He adhered to this, his first hypothesis.

The Foreign Powers still thought they could come to terms with Napoleon, whose defeat was not final. The Bourbons were forgotten and ignored. Moreover, he mistrusted them and thought little of their gratitude.

The conversation was resumed on the following day. In the meantime the views of Prince de Bénévent had changed in another direction :

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“We might rid ourselves of the newly fledged brood by offering the throne to the Duc d’Orléans. This would stimulate patriotic ideas.”

His friend, who was duly schooled, resented the idea of usurpers and usurpation.

On this occasion, Talleyrand would not yield an inch. The Bourbon cause was making no headway.

During several days this strange conversation continued between the witty woman and the statesman. Talleyrand remained indifferent and purposely heedless.

Madame de Coigny understood quite well that he had fallen back upon his usual tactics. He temporised so as to reap the benefit of the lesson afforded by the accomplished fact. She returned again and again to her favourite subject, if not for the love of her King, at any rate for the love of Bruno. She was amply rewarded as she entered his picture-gallery one morning. He rose to greet her and having made sure that the door was hermetically closed, he returned to her, saying :

“Madame de Coigny, I accept the King, but . . .”

She did not give him time to qualify this suspended “but.”

With that vivacity which is the privilege of women she threw her arms round his neck and thanked him profusely.

He smiled at her exuberance and continued :

“Yes, I am quite willing to do so, but I must apprise you of the relations that exist between that family and myself.”

He then proceeded to explain. The Comte d’Artois might possibly remember a certain matter that brought them into contact, but the Pretender, his brother, had no knowledge whatever of Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, who did not care to run the risk of being pardoned or having to justify his past conduct. What he expected were tokens of gratitude. It was therefore advisable to communicate with him before taking any definite steps in the matter.

“I can put you into immediate communication,”

said Mme de Coigny. "I shall write a letter to the King and M. de Talleyrand will not be forgotten."

The diplomat betrayed the greatest excitement on hearing these words, much against his custom.

"Pray do, and bring it to me to-morrow. I am dying to read it."

He read it over and over again and heartily approved of it. When he had weighed every word of its contents, he spoke out his mind.

"Yes, I am heart and soul in this transaction, and you can rely upon me to the utmost. Keep up an active correspondence with the brother of Louis XVI, while we ensure the safety of this country by rescuing it from a lunatic. I have a code with Caulaincourt by which he will inform me whether the Emperor accepts or rejects the peace proposals. We must give the fullest publicity to the harm he has done, to the fact that he has broken faith towards everyone and failed to carry out a single engagement subscribed by him in order to become Emperor of the French."

Day by day this plan ripened and grew strong in the mind of Talleyrand, who carefully observed the symptoms of the monarchical Revolution which was simmering, thanks to him.

He had deemed fit to call one morning upon his fair visitor. The following words addressed to her on that occasion sum up most accurately the part he played in the overthrow of Napoleon :

"It is now necessary to take immediate steps in the most dignified manner possible. Napoleon has just refused to entertain offers of peace at Montereau. His slight success has so turned his head that he speaks of returning to Vienna. Châtillon has been chosen as the meeting-place of a general Congress to be attended by Lord Castlereagh and the representatives of the Sovereigns of Europe, who will discuss the terms of peace which are to be offered for the last time to the French Emperor. If he accepts those terms, all is lost and once more our unhappy country will be handed over to the effervescence

of a military domination which will alter all accepted principles of morality and politics and will only confer the name of virtue upon submission and obedience to the spirit of conquest, the glory of which must never be questioned. When the Senate assembles it must afford us a way out and safeguard its own existence by protecting ours. This is what it can do by its natural right as the defender of fundamental laws. One of its members must ascend the tribune and denounce Napoleon thus :

“ ‘ Inasmuch as he was elected Emperor on conditions which he has not kept, viz. that the taxes of the country should be determined by its representatives, that the expenditure of her revenue should be accounted for, and that he should afford to every citizen the enjoyment of personal liberty and liberty of conscience, he is stripped of all rights by the terms of a contract which he has violated. The income was raised in accordance with his own fancy, the liberty of citizens has been denied them both in their acts and in their thoughts and the right to call fresh levies grossly abused by him. As a result, the population is attenuated, the country is in mourning and its male population consists only of children and old men. Europe is strewn with our dead, France overrun by enemies whom he cannot expel by war, and from whom he will not deliver us by accepting peace.

“ Again, let it be said that as he failed to fulfil the conditions of the contract, which was the basis of his authority, that contract is null and void and he is declared to be a disturber of the public peace and an outlaw.”

He then sketched in terms both brief and precise what the Senate should erect in the room of that which it had overthrown. Things came to pass in accordance with the programme formulated by him one morning in the presence only of a high-born lady, whom chance and friendship had made the partner of his designs.

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Those who have never given themselves entirely are always ready to take themselves back. Clever, foreseeing people had not waited till then to engineer their secret secession. The Prince's door was besieged. Every man of influence and authority was eager to obtain a private interview with him. Each successful caller seemed to say to the other: "I have outstripped you, for now he is *my* chief." ¹

He had not yet entered into any definite arrangements as the crisis had not reached a definite issue.

Talleyrand was not particularly fond of the Bourbons and had certain reasons to apprehend their resentment. He therefore hesitated to bring them back to power. Having no absolute principles, save such as were vouchsafed by experience, his final decision in political fluctuations was adopted after slow and mature reflection and was always dictated by the course of events.

Every evening his visitors included the Duc de Dalberg, the Comte de Jaucourt, the Archbishop of Pradt and the Abbé Louis. They played whist and did not question what their line of conduct would be if the Congress of Châtillon came to a sudden end. Most of those present had held power for twenty-five years and agreed with the Prince that for the present it was advisable to respect the established order of things while declaring the yoke intolerable. There were too many divergent elements at issue, and nothing could be determined until they knew the decision of the coalition.

Until the 15th of March, 1814, the Powers were still anxious to treat with Napoleon. Had he signed the ultimatum of Châtillon, he would have remained the master of a humiliated and subjected France.

When the representatives of Austria, Russia and England had met fifteen days previously, they could not have contemplated the possibility of France being governed by any other Sovereign. His obstinacy alone made the negotiations abortive. While his heart was

¹ *Memoirs of Aimée de Coigny.*

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still buoyed by the hope of victory, he had proudly said :

“ If France desires me to govern her upon the basis of her old limitations, I shall say to her, ‘ Find someone to govern you, I am too great for you.’ ”

Events had mustered with breathless speed. Whatever he did with his men and his artillery, he was compelled to recognise the impotence of one man against a coalesced Europe. He did not condescend to admit his faults, but could not avoid their consequences. The harsh domination which had so long crushed his subjects and his own family snapped at the very hour predicted by Talleyrand. He moderated his language when he found himself with his back to the wall and declared that he was ready to accept anything so long as he might continue to reign. To that end he would have sworn to give liberty to his people and to preserve peace towards his enemies.

But what would be the final decision of the Allies ? That was the whole problem. Urged by conviction, by personal interest, and by the fear that Bonaparte might return and indict him for preaching the doctrine of usurpation, Talleyrand had not lost a moment or neglected an effort to influence that decision and to lead the Allies to any conclusion save the restoration of the Empire.

He had taken timely precautions, obtained formal terms from the Comte d’Artois and given verbal instructions to Baron de Vitrolles before sending him to Metternich first and then to the Tzar. His whole object was to make them promise that no negotiations would be resumed with the Emperor.

He was still a member of the Council of Regency, to which he had been appointed by Napoleon after his second departure for the front in January, 1814. Every evening he waited on the Empress Marie-Louise, who was surrounded by a large number of people all eager for news.

Talleyrand was at the Tuileries on the day when

Napoleon pursued Blücher the Prussian General, thereby allowing the Austrian army corps to advance on Fontainebleau.

Paris might fall at any moment into the hands of the invaders. The fears conceived were quickly followed by the event which was said to have been hastened by the secret encouragements sent by Prince de Bénévent to the invading forces.¹

At the Court of Marie-Louise he had seen the pallor of anxiety on every face. The Comte de Montesquiou, an old aristocrat, and Boulay de la Meurthe, an old Jacobin, were equally depressed. Both happened to be serving the same Master, owing to the whimsical fate of revolutions.

On the following day he was in Mme de Rémusat's drawing-room. Pasquier was also there, and so was Talleyrand. He gave a thrilling description of the deplorable state of affairs. In terms full of eloquence he related the causes of France's misfortunes and of his own defection, both due to the obstinate, insensate pride of the Master and to the blind servility of those around him. Reason, independence, courage and strength had lacked everywhere, or could not be found concentrated in any one man who might have stopped the Emperor and saved the Empire upon the brink of ruin. It was now too late and someone else must deal the cards.

As a last concession to the Bonaparte dynasty whom

¹ We read the following assertions in the Memoirs of the Comtesse de Boigne :

“ M. de Nesselrode said to me :

“ ‘ Would you like to see the documents which made us attempt the march on to Paris ? ’

“ ‘ Most assuredly.’

“ ‘ Here they are.’ He took from his pocket-book a small piece of paper, torn and crumpled, upon which the following words were written in invisible ink.

“ ‘ You are groping like children, and you should be walking on stilts. You can do anything you like. You know this sign, and you can have full confidence in the bearer.’ I did not lose a word. The note was written by Talleyrand after the Allies retreated from Montereau, and reached them near Troyes. The instructions given to the bearer of this strange letter induced the Allies to march back on Paris” (vol. i., pp. 339, 340).

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he had served for many years, or acting perhaps from personal motives, he had implored of Marie-Louise not to abandon her capital while the enemies were marching on Paris. He repeated that this was the only means of saving the dynasty. In giving this advice he bore in mind the possible solutions of the Imperial liquidation. In case the Regency remained in the hands of Marie-Louise, she would no doubt remember that he had best served her interests at a very critical moment.

Circumstances altered the case, for Joseph soon brought a letter from his brother ordering the Empress and the Members of the Government to withdraw to the Provinces. It was then that Talleyrand said to Savary, as they left the Council Chamber together :

“ Well, here is the end of all this. Do you not think so ? It seems a pity to lose such a fine game through the stupidity of a few ignorant folk, whose nefarious influence endures from day to day. The Emperor is much to be pitied, yet he will not be pitied because there is no justification for keeping such people around him. It is weakness, inconceivable weakness, on the part of such a man.

“ What a downfall is his, my dear sir ! To think that he has given his name to adventures, instead of giving it to a century ! When I ponder over it all I feel that I could weep. Let us see now what will happen. Instead of insulting me, the Emperor would have been better advised to judge those who poisoned his mind against me. He would then have seen that such friends as those were more dangerous than enemies. What would he have said of another who had behaved as he has done ? ”

The followers of the Empress were very anxious to witness Talleyrand's departure, but he hastened slowly. The Arch-Chancellor, the Ministers and members of the Government were on the road to Blois. Why did he not repair thither as they did ?

On the 29th of March, the eve of her departure, Marie-Louise sent the Duchesse de Montebello to ascertain

the hour of the Prince's departure. Alas, he could give no precise information! He would doubtless join His Majesty in compliance with his most ardent desire, but nearly every road was blocked. Besides, it seemed preferable to travel in small parties. Madame de Montebello still awaited a definite answer. He accompanied her to the top of the staircase with the greatest politeness, and as he bade her *au revoir*, at Blois or elsewhere, he seized her two hands, grasped them affectionately, and said: "My dear Duchesse, you may be certain that the Emperor and the Empress are both the victims of an odious conspiracy."

By enacting this little comedy Talleyrand wanted to indict the ill-intentioned or clumsy advisers who had urged the departure of the Government for Blois without the slightest hope of its ever returning to Paris.

If certain anecdotes be true, he adopted other measures for remaining in Paris while pretending to leave it. It is said that he drove away at full gallop, followed by his livery on horseback. The party reached the outposts of the *Étoile*. The carriage stopped. The guard turned out and the sergeant claimed inspection of passports:

"It is the Prince Vice-Grand Elector," exclaimed one of his men.

"If so, he can pass," replied the sergeant.

The soldiery fell back in awe.

"No," said the Prince, suddenly fired by civic righteousness, "no, I have no passport, and I do not wish to break the law."

They retraced their steps and soon reached the Rue Saint-Florentin.

He walked into his drawing-room as though he had just enjoyed a quiet drive and gave orders for the reception of his guest, His Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias.

At his invitation the Tzar had elected to take up his residence with him. He had advised him of the fact an

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hour previously and when they met he explained his decision in the following words :

“ M. de Talleyrand, I have elected to reside with you because you possess my confidence and that of my Allies. We have not wished to decide upon anything before hearing from you. You know France, her needs and her wishes. Pray tell us what to do and we shall do it ! ”

Was not this conferring upon him full powers to speak and act ?

Talleyrand would have been ill-advised indeed to follow the fugitive Court, when by remaining at home he became within a few hours the most important man in France and the one statesman whom the coalesced Sovereigns of Europe could consult upon the overthrow of the Empire. He was the much-esteemed adviser of Kings whom he had so efficiently helped to overthrow the giant. He was the inevitable negotiator and Master of the situation. And what a situation !

From that day there was an extraordinary agitation among the crowds that waited upon Talleyrand, who had just handed back his title of Prince de Bénévènt without feeling one whit belittled by so doing.

It has been said that during this solemn moment in history, the destinies of the world were sealed within the four walls of his house. A striking impression of this is derived from the narrative of Comte Beugnot, a document written as he left the presence of Talleyrand. The house was filled by an extraordinary variety of people whose interests were as varied as their personalities. The first floor was reserved for the Tzar of Russia and his staff. Nesselrode and the Secretaries of the Russian Embassy had been accommodated on the second floor. Talleyrand had reserved the ground floor, composed of six apartments, as the Government Offices as well as his own. Every nook in the house was occupied, including the staircases, which were lined by the Russian Imperial Guard. Cossacks filled the courtyard and surrounded the mansion.

There was a continuous series of goings and comings, a concourse of extraordinary folk, a state of intense agitation in which night and day seemed merged into one. The only peaceful men in this political beehive devoured by activity were the Cossacks, who slept the sleep of the just, ignorant and heedless of what was going on. Three of the ground-floor rooms, including that giving on to the courtyard, were thrown open to the public. To the first one were admitted applicants of minor importance, while in the second one it was easy to recognise intriguers of the first rank and of the first water. The third room was occupied by Laborie, Assistant-Secretary to the tentative Government. Talleyrand gave audiences in the library. There he listened to those who had sufficient skill, luck, or perseverance to attract and arrest his attention.

His was not an easy task, if we can believe M. Laborie.

“ It was strange indeed to see the lame M. de Talleyrand endeavouring to reach the library from his bedroom, in order to see someone to whom he had promised an audience and who had waited many hours. He was compelled to cross the drawing-room, but on his way through he was stopped by one, seized by another and barred by a third, until he returned whence he had come in deep despair. All this time the legitimate caller was devoured by anxiety. A better idea can be formed of the agitation and intrigues which heralded the coming of the new reign, when one remembers that the only possible time to see Talleyrand was between midnight and two in the morning.

The task accomplished was stupendous.

It is idle to recall the activity displayed during April, 1814, thanks to which he induced the several Powers to recognise the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy after many hesitations on their part, or the clever way in which he checkmated the supreme efforts of the Field-Marshal in favour of their Master who had at last fallen a victim to Might. He had definitely effected the ruin of the Empire by obtaining the Tzar's solemn promise that he would have no more dealings with Napoleon or

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his family. It was with the greatest subtlety that as President of the provisional Government he saw to the pressing wants of the country, circumvented the gravest difficulties, obtained the release of a hundred and fifty thousand French prisoners in Russia, snatched from German greed the Provinces that had been crushed by the troops of Frederick-William, and finally facilitated the evacuation of French territory. The succession of these historical events is so well known that we need not retrace it here.

France found herself in the same position as after Ryswick under Louis XIV. She had to hand back all the territories and strongholds which she had looked upon as permanent possessions in virtue of the law of conquests. She was compelled, moreover, to bear all the expenses entailed by their acquisition and their loss.

In these days of dire distress Talleyrand had energetically endeavoured to lighten the burden of sacrifice. He had the consolation to insert much easier conditions in the treaty of Paris than those contained in the ultimatum accepted at the Châtillon Congress by Caulaincourt in the name of the Emperor.

The secret warfare which was waged for years between Napoleon and Talleyrand, between the principles of war and those of peace, had ended in the humiliation and subjection of the latter, but at a heavy cost to France.

The Conqueror, the legislator, the strategist, the founder of Constitutions, the leader of nations and of armies was but a lost shadow that faded away in the mists of the island of Elba.

The man of calm judgment, the clear-sighted diplomatist, the enemy of all political excesses, the able negotiator was in the front rank, dictating his will to the world. He was ready to start for the Congress of Vienna, where we shall meet him later.¹ There he was bidden to meet

¹ The description of the Congress of Vienna will be found in the first chapter of the second volume.

Europe as the representative of a conquered nation. His sagacity, his perseverance, his supreme art in pitting interests against conflicting interests enabled him to make just and moderate laws prevail among the nations while his qualities earned for him that ascendancy, that undeniable preponderance which marked the zenith of his diplomatic career.

CHAPTER XII

NAPOLEON AND TALLEYRAND

An obvious parallel—Napoleon's different impressions and judgments on Talleyrand—A period of confidence and intimacy—Capricious changes in Napoleon's character—Epistolary effusions of Talleyrand to the First Consul—How so much love was spoilt—Early quarrels—The motives and results of their dispute—Napoleon's violence—His frigid, sullen, and calculating enmity towards Talleyrand—An impartial judgment upon Talleyrand's behaviour towards Napoleon—Reproaches of venality and of treachery hurled at the statesman—The moral personality of Napoleon—His appalling principles deprive him of all claims to gratitude—A last point of comparison in favour of the man of peace compared with the man of war.

DURING one of his frequent fits of spite against an intelligence that he could never overawe, against a mind that he could never master, Napoleon stated in a nutshell his opinion of Talleyrand, his whole work and his reputation. He was convinced that his judgment would be endorsed by the world at large.

“Posterity will grant him no more room than is needed to state that he was a member of every Government, that he took twenty¹ oaths of allegiance, and that I was fool enough to be deceived by him.”

History showed herself more generous, and refused to ratify such a summary judgment. On the contrary, history gave both breadth and weight to the part played by the man who was the sworn enemy, polite and sometimes perfidious, of Napoleon's later faults. In truth, the methods adopted by him to counteract the evil at times assumed the appearances of treachery because of their affected politeness.

¹ The exact number was thirteen.

The two characters have remained exposed in the fair light of their respective proportions and if the one was superior to the other by the power of its radiation, it was never able to eclipse it. The glory of Napoleon reached farther and rose higher, but he was uprooted by the storm, to which Talleyrand bowed and therefore survived.

None was so intimately associated as Talleyrand in the vast and tumultuous designs of the modern Alexander. None knew as he did the character, power of thought, irregularities and excesses of the Emperor. He held the ladder upon which Bonaparte ascended, but turned against him when he felt that the hero was hopelessly lost. Napoleon had no more precious ally and no more dangerous adversary. He was well aware of the fact.¹ His mind was thoroughly made up on the point, but he returned to the Minister who deceived him and sought his advice after the terrible lesson of 1814 and even during the Hundred Days, when he was looking for a ray of light upon the brink of the precipice as he groped there in the darkness of despair. These two energies were the completion of one another. The first was the incarnation of the genius of action, while the second was the perfect expression of that calm and powerful strength of reflection and cool analysis which paves the way to great decisions or enables one to attenuate their unsuccessful results.

Mignet, the historian, had rightly said of Napoleon that his projects were great, glorious and luminous. Talleyrand spared no effort in minimising their danger. The creative furore of him who possessed power could be tempered by the circumspection and calculation of the prudent Minister, to such extent as the one allowed the other to intervene or to advise.

¹ "Do not trust Talleyrand. I have practised him for fourteen years, and I have even been good to him. He is to-day the bitterest enemy of our house, and has been ever since fortune began to frown upon us" (*Napoleon's Correspondence*, vol. xxvii., p. 131, Document 21, 210; Letter to King Joseph, Nogent, 8th February, 1814).

Talleyrand excelled in rounding off the sharp corners in the dispatches dictated by Napoleon, whom he enabled to assume an air of greater strength and ability once he had impressed him with his calmer views. An ingenious euphemism, a wise step, an opportune delay, a truce at the right moment, such were the means used by Talleyrand to deaden the effects of a dangerous and sudden shock.

Napoleon was fond of playing the part of Jupiter, especially that of Jupiter the Thunderer and on such occasions he forgot the adulation bestowed upon him by his Minister and the many services he had rendered. He would hurl reproaches at him in the coarsest terms; but nevertheless he entrusted him with negotiations of Amiens and Presbourg if not with those of Tilsitt, thus proving that he deemed none worthier of his confidence than the man whom he traduced in anger.

He wrote to him: "I wish peace to be concluded. Settle the clauses of the treaty as you think fit."

When he endeavoured to organise Germany and Italy by dividing up their territories and their Governments so as to strengthen the unity of his Empire, he consulted Talleyrand at length upon the details of his scheme. He had never looked upon Talleyrand's character as a mirror of righteousness, nor did he bestow any praise upon him on that head. Yet every line of his correspondence bears testimony to his appreciation of his Minister's diplomatic foresight and to the price at which he valued services which he had been able to judge both in victory and in defeat.

He must have considered this man very useful, or else he greatly feared his hidden designs, for though he never trusted him he heaped honours and wealth upon him with untold munificence. His actions may have been dictated by the superstitious feeling that he could not succeed if deprived of the mysterious influence of Talleyrand's presence.

During seven years he kept him as his Foreign Minister. He created high offices hitherto unknown

so that he might be called Vice-Grand Elector after being known as Lord High Chamberlain. Finally, he endowed him with the principality of Bénévent.

Having done all this, Napoleon subsequently declared that he had grossly exaggerated his merits, that he was neither eloquent nor persuasive in conversations started by the Emperor with a view to obtaining some enlightenment, and that as a result he generally knew as much at the beginning as he did at the end of a weighty interview with his principal adviser.

It would seem that in these somewhat uncomfortable conversations with a fiery and imaginative speaker like the Emperor, Talleyrand purposely confined himself to one argument and reverted to it incessantly, knowing it to be the key to the situation. After many fruitless efforts he no doubt desisted in his attempts to convince a man who contradicted him without hearing him, and got out of his difficulties as best he could by using some evasive sentences.

Napoleon could not have had such a poor opinion of his advice, else he would not have sought it and deplored being deprived of it during troubled times. "Why was not Talleyrand by his side? Ah, if Talleyrand had only had the handling of this business!" Such were the complimentary remarks made to Talleyrand's successor when the poor man was unable to unravel some knotty question.

In 1809, at Schönbrunn, he thus rebuked M. de Champigny for the delay in the negotiations:—

"Talleyrand would have proceeded much quicker than this. It would have cost me £3,000,000 perhaps and he would no doubt have robbed me of half of that, but I should have concluded the matter long ago."

Napoleon had good reason to suspect the intrigues woven abroad by his so-called allies¹ and his avowed enemies. In his endeavour to determine who were his friends and who were against him, he sought the light as he felt his way in the dark, but finally had to invoke

¹ "Allies on vellum and traitors in their souls" (Albert Sorel).

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the aid of Talleyrand. Recently he had complained bitterly of the mysterious course pursued by his Minister, but he addressed him thus when in need of his services :

“ You are a strange man, but I cannot help liking you.”

He did not believe what he said, and Talleyrand lent no faith to his assertions.¹

The very next day he indulged in furious tirades against the innate treachery of his Minister.

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It was Napoleon's delight to startle people by most embarrassing sallies. As a rule he alone spoke, and his circle listened to him with profound respect and considerable fear. Those present seldom dared to oppose his arguments or query his statements, whatever might be the subject of his monologue. If directly questioned by him, they answered evasively or simply bowed in acquiescence. Talleyrand did not actually suffer from this general feeling of timidity, genuine in some cases, assumed in others, in the presence of the Great Man. He awaited the tilt without flinching and his retort courteous, couched in terms of contained irony, was always conveyed in a tone of respect, if not of praise.

At a time when the Emperor had not yet renounced all forms of urbanity, Talleyrand could avoid awkward details by expressing a pleasant witticism which enabled him to glide over everything else. He also used flattery with much effect, so cleverly that it was not interpreted as such. This was the only sort of flattery that had not been exhausted in this atmosphere of adulation.

¹ We find the following anecdote in the *Memoirs of Metternich* : “ The Emperor said to me one day : ‘ When I want something done I do not employ Prince de Bénévent. When I do not wish a certain course to be adopted, I send for him and declare to him that it is my express desire that the said course should be followed ’ ” (*Metternich's Memoirs*, vol. i., p. 70).

This was a counter-finesse. In using these words, Napoleon was perhaps flattering Metternich by suggesting that he was confiding to him that which he had hidden from Talleyrand.

At Brussels Madame de Rémusat heard Talleyrand's well-known answer to Napoleon, as the latter taunted him upon the rapid fortune which had accrued to him :

“ M. de Talleyrand, they say you are very rich.”

“ Yes, Majesty.”

“ They even say you are immensely wealthy.”

“ Yes, Your Majesty.”

“ But how did you manage to amass such wealth ? Were you not almost poor when you returned from America ? ”

“ That is true, Sire ; but on the eve of the 18th Brumaire I bought all the stock that I could lay hands upon, and I sold it on the 19th of the same month.”

This was a well devised tale, and it served his purpose. It had to be accepted as current coin.

His tempered independence was tolerated by Napoleon because of the delicate way in which it was displayed. Talleyrand endeavoured to preserve it in the discussion of the various subjects which brought their ideas into contact. At times they discussed literature and fine arts together, although Napoleon preferred to debate upon those questions with poets and artists.

He and his Minister were exchanging views one day and hopelessly failed to agree while discussing the attributes of good taste, that happy discrimination, quick, precise, of everything true, beautiful, and just in thought and in its expression.

“ Good taste, indeed ! ” Prince de Bénévent exclaimed. “ Why, if you could have got rid of good taste by the help of cannon-balls, it would have ceased to exist long ago.”

Talleyrand was a good listener, and could impart praise to the silence he observed. This was the best way to please Napoleon, though it sometimes roused his suspicion. He did not quite trust this complimentary silence. He felt that it disguised dissentient after-thoughts which he resented, though he did not know their nature and only apprehended their existence.

These two masters of dissimulation presented a strange contrast indeed. Napoleon laid down as a principle that a political man should reckon the profits to be derived not only from his qualities but from his defects. Talleyrand held identical views, but what annoyed him was that Napoleon practised his theories with such perfection that he deceived the most far-seeing man. He said one day before Mme de Rémusat :

“ This devil of a man practises deceit at every turn, on every point. You fail even to detect his passions, for he finds the means of feigning passions, though really possessed of them.”

In the comedy which they played, the cloaks of sincerity worn by them were equally flimsy and threadbare. Napoleon manœuvred with more cunning, Talleyrand with more mystery, and though the latter transacted business with the thousand restrictions dear to diplomats, he pursued a more loyal and open course, anxious to reach the goal because he objected to living on the *qui vive*, in a constant state of uncertainty.

At a period which still seemed to offer some stability, Talleyrand demurely seconded the Emperor, though they did not always find themselves in perfect harmony. The basis of diplomatic negotiations was often attacked and threatened by unforeseen criticism of a more or less violent nature. At times he was accused of transgressing the power invested in him.

As soon as the storm had blown over he resumed the discussion, remembering that he had often found it difficult to pursue a moderate policy. On many occasions he had endeavoured to restrain the violence of ultra-Revolutionists and to appease the anger of those in power. As a result, he had incurred the displeasure of both Parties. The Republicans accused him of wishing to bring the State under the heel of the despot, and the despot, furious at meeting the slightest resistance and at his polite refusal to applaud everything he did, taunted him with this semi-independence and called it base treason.

When the peace of Amiens was signed, Talleyrand expressed his gratitude towards Him who had secured his lifelong devotion.

Under the Directoire he transgressed all bounds. Wishing to lull the suspicions of the "Directors," he described Bonaparte as a simple soul enamoured of peace, who studied the poems of Ossian, and whose one desire was to rest after his victories. He knew full well that in making such a statement he did not speak as an oracle of truth.

Under the Consulate he was no doubt prompted once more by friendship. When compelled to take the waters at Bourbon, he wrote to Bonaparte deploring the fact that for three long weeks he would be unable to witness the sublime activity of the hero.¹

"What is to become of me, what can I do away from the source of my inspiration?"

"The fact has just dawned upon me that for the last two years I have been unable to think or act alone. When I do not see you my mind is like a ship without a rudder, so in all likelihood my writings will have little merit. You must not blame me for this, as I am not complete when at a distance from you."

When the Empire was founded, his accents rose to the level of his hero's greatness:

"Can it be true? You are now a monarch, and you love me still!"

Nothing interested him now but Napoleon's glory. Upon that alone was concentrated his self-pride. Without yielding to the genius of toadyism, so contrary to good taste, he offered him that incense, the brew of which is only known to experts:

"Sire, separated as I am from Your Majesty, my greatest or rather my only consolation is to make contact with your August Person by remembering the past and foreseeing the present. The past explains the present to me, and what Your Majesty has done

¹ National Archives of France. Talleyrand's letter to Bonaparte, 20 Messidore, year IX, Fol. 11, p. 658.

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affords me a presage of Your Majesty's future action. The determinations of ordinary men are subject to constant changes, but those of Your Majesty are born of natural greatness, and must therefore remain irrevocably, the same under all circumstances."¹

Talleyrand wrote it with a view to keeping Napoleon within the bounds of moderation after his rapid victories in Germany. He felt at that time that he should obtain his adherence to a policy of just and generous conciliation.

No cleverer letters were ever written by Voltaire to Frederick than those addressed by Talleyrand to Napoleon. It is therefore interesting to sum up the reasons which changed such protestations of affection and fidelity into the bitterest antagonism, which Prince de Bénévent disguised by continuing to perform his duties with apparent submission.

The Emperor and his Minister constantly disagreed upon the European question, but their differences were of a moderate nature so long as fortune favoured the Empire. They were followed by periods of conciliation and exemplary harmony, during which both Emperor and statesman deceived each other to their hearts' content. Napoleon almost grew to like him, as much as he could ever like anyone or anything outside himself.

Talleyrand was charmed by the benevolent attentions in which the Emperor excelled when he chose. He even acknowledged favours received at the hands of his Master. He never forgot the usual harshness which so often made him wince, but constantly recalled examples of Napoleon's occasional amenity.

On one occasion he was indulging in superlative praise when Montrond interrupted him thus :

"You can praise him to your heart's content, for Heaven knows you have done him enough harm."

During many years Talleyrand's credit was such that he alone exercised considerable influence over Bonaparte, who lent an ear to all he said without being

¹ Talleyrand's letter to Napoleon, 17th of October, 1805.

prompted by the slightest sympathy. Notwithstanding these advantages, he was never lured by the hope of converting such a domineering spirit to his views or to his policy of moderation, but he had conceived the hope of damming the torrent.

In the words of the historian, he had endeavoured to mate Napoleon's passions by utilising them in the pursuit of great and useful creations.

With his keen perception and his love of novelty, the Emperor was disposed to follow him. Without a moment's hesitation he undertook an enterprise, the foundations of which he rapidly sketched. Unfortunately he did not always adhere to his first plans. Caught by some other current, he would either neglect or demolish the building which he had begun to erect. Talleyrand had no taste for hand-to-hand struggles, and as a rule did not push matters further. Discouragement was the natural result of all this, and the resources which he had placed at the services of Bonaparte were diverted and eventually used against him when fortune had ceased to smile upon the little Corsican.

Both had had ample opportunities for studying each other's character during constant interviews in which their mutual mistrust enjoyed the fullest play. Talleyrand harboured no illusion as to the Emperor's inability to grow attached to any human being. Napoleon, on the other hand, knew well what he might expect of Talleyrand when his own personal interests were not concerned. He was secretly delighted, however, at being able to dispose of the services of this perfect courtier and high-born gentleman. He believed in the blind devotion of a Duc de Bassano, but he was not deceived by the apparent fidelity of other members of his entourage. He husbanded Talleyrand and tolerated Fouché because he preferred to keep them under his thumb than to set them at liberty. He knew their true sentiments, and the names of Talleyrand and Fouché were a continual obsession in his thoughts. When he had lost the power to strike, he sought to be revenged for the harm they had

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done him and cursed his own imprudence for not having smitten them while it was yet time. On certain occasions the living enigma called Talleyrand had the faculty of exasperating him to the utmost extent. He would then consider the advisability of retaining him as Minister, of sending him abroad as an Ambassador, or of compassing his death by murder. He wondered whether he would have more to fear from him alive or dead, highly honoured or in exile. He also wondered whether money could buy him over for once and for all, or whether he would escape like a flitting shadow once his fortune was achieved.

He had often made up his mind to ruin him, and had deferred doing so lest it might be said that he had got rid of him through fear.

The first coolness which occurred between them was due to causes of a human order. Napoleon was devoured by jealous susceptibility, notwithstanding his genius, and he resented the marked successes of his companions in arms as keenly as he objected to those of his diplomats. It was his conviction that every success should be vested in himself alone. In this he was the replica of Louis XIV, whose Generals and Ministers could only indulge in some brilliant initiative by making him believe that he alone had inspired it and that the glory of it redounded upon him. Conscious of his ability in diplomatic matters, Talleyrand had conceived fond hopes that the Emperor might long remain under his influence, but from the day he tried to make himself indispensable, that influence was lost for ever. Napoleon hated to hear other men praised, and his ears tingled whenever the prudence and sagacity of Talleyrand were extolled in his presence. He grew tired of a Minister who was given credit for the achievement of every successful negotiation. He felt that he was being robbed of some of his power.

He removed Talleyrand from Foreign Affairs, compensated him with the bestowal of ornamental dignities, and replaced him by a highly educated but very

weak man like Champagny, thus making it clear that he, Chief of the State, conceived his own plans and executed them without help.

With the exception of a few desultory interviews, he held aloof from Talleyrand and worked henceforth with the Comte de Champagny.

The Signatory of the Treaties of Lunéville, Amiens, and Presbourg was filled with bitterness which he visited upon Master and subordinate alike. He railed piteously at his successor and at the childish nature of his duties, but realised with deep sorrow his inability to allay the consequences of the Emperor's rash policy.

Napoleon was far too able not to perceive that he had keenly wounded Talleyrand's pride, and that neither money nor honours could heal a wound, the first effect of which was to choke every feeling of fidelity and of gratitude. He knew this the more as he had been afforded many proofs of the unscrupulous nature of the man who had helped him to rise upon the ruins of the Directoire, which he had betrayed as one of its members. His mistrust of his former Minister became stronger and stronger, until he made it known on every possible occasion.

They were well matched, for Talleyrand had also realised the futility of his zealous efforts, as useless to others as they were to himself. In a few years their mutual discontent resolved itself into a feeling of coolness, which caused misunderstanding and eventually gave birth to profound hatred. Within those few years Talleyrand gloated over the downfall of the Emperor and the Empire.

“The negotiator eventually finds an opportunity for coming by his ends.”¹

That opportunity was bound to come within the time foreseen by Talleyrand, as the natural result of his intrigues, some of which were conceived, we admit, in the interests of universal peace. Napoleon's acts and pronouncements were hardly calculated to make him

¹ Richelieu's political testament.

desist or alter the course he had adopted. Many harsh sayings were brought home to him before the final crash occurred. He pretended not to hear them and did not modify his ways or actions in consequence of them. Though possessed of that great patience which enabled him to overlook impetuous and hurried actions, to smile at impertinence when he could not check it with one word, or to swallow insults hurled from on high, he was far from being as callous as his phlegmatic attitude might have led one to suppose. He did not forget, but pretended to do so. His art resided in knowing how to wait. Napoleon had conceived a strange idea, often justified, of human meanness. It led him to think that a subordinate's friendship for his master must increase the more he was hustled and insulted, provided he found that such a course could serve his interests. He had put this theory into practice in the case of his own brothers, High Dignitaries of State and subordinates of lower rank. He was mistaken in trying to mete out the same treatment to a Salicetti or to a Talleyrand.

The first seeds of the latter's hatred were sown by the dual humiliation visited upon him by Bonaparte, who first compelled him to contract an unworthy marriage, and then expelled from Court the woman whom he had urged him to take as a wife. In addition to these grievances of an intimate order, there were more general causes which we have described, quite sufficient in themselves to explain his action in pitting against Napoleon the full force of adverse circumstances.

The Spanish campaign brought about the final rupture.

While the invasion of the Peninsula was being discussed, Talleyrand protested at a Council of State, composed of slaves, against an act of brigandage as impolitic as it was dangerous. It was an unholy thing, he declared, to invade a country without a just motive for war. The failure of this act of violation was certain from the very inception, which was the invasion of Burgos and Barcelona. Its author endeavoured to

fix the blame of it upon the very man who deprecated this mad and wicked attempt. Notwithstanding Talleyrand's statements, Napoleon boldly asserted that he confiscated the throne of Spain at the instigation of his Minister.

As early as 1805 the Prince was aware that the Emperor nurtured the hope of replacing the dynasty of the Bourbons by that of the Bonapartes. It is possible that while not approving of this principle, he may have endorsed it as the means of obtaining for France the territory situated on the North of the Ebro, in exchange for which Portugal would have reverted to the Spanish monarchy. The means employed were not those which he had foreseen, but a series of treacherous and deceitful machinations which he denounced in the following words :

“ It is lawful to seize thrones, but it is mean to pilfer them.”

He expressed himself in similar terms to Comte Beugnot, who has recorded his words. It is common knowledge that the plot was cleverly weaved. The spoliation of a king who had come with full confidence to do homage to an ally of ten years' standing was consummated with the utmost treachery and with heinous craftiness.

The Spanish Princes were illegally imprisoned at Valençay.¹ The throne of Spain was vacant and its territory overrun by French troops.

Joseph had only to take possession of his kingdom. The programme of this robbery had been followed to the letter according to the orders issued by one whose activity was never paralysed by his conscience.

Napoleon was convinced that if the Spaniards were mad enough to resist him he would annihilate them. He therefore looked upon the Peninsula matter as closed and unworthy of his attention, which he

¹ Talleyrand, who liked positive business dealings, had let the property to Napoleon for the sum of seventy-five thousand francs. It was meant to serve as the compulsory residence of Ferdinand VII and his brother, Infant don Carlos.

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directed towards Austria, intent upon pulverising it. He also prepared his plans for the destruction of his rivals of to-day and to-morrow. He was triumphant, having met with no other opposition than that offered by Talleyrand. He wished him to witness the proud satisfaction that swelled his heart and brain. With that object he summoned him from Valençay to Nantes, where he had stopped on his return from Bayonne.

At their first meeting he greeted Prince de Bénévent in the following words :

“ Well, you see the result of your predictions concerning the difficulties which were to beset me before I concluded this Spanish business in accordance with my views. I got the best of these people for all that. They were all caught in my nets, and now I am Master of the situation both in Spain and in the whole of Europe.”

He spoke in a sarcastic tone. Talleyrand was seriously impressed by this excessive confidence, knowing that grave complications might yet ensue in a matter which was still in its inception. He declared that he could not take the same view of it, and that in his opinion the Emperor had lost much more than he had gained at Bayonne.

“ What do you mean by that ? ” said the Emperor as he ceased to pace the room.

The Minister replied by the following example : “ It is as simple as can be and I will prove it to you. If a man of the world commits certain follies, if he has mistresses and behaves badly towards his wife, or even wrongs his friends, he is blamed, no doubt ; but if he is rich, powerful, and clever, society will forgive him. If the same man cheats at cards he is expelled from all decent society and can never expect forgiveness.”

Napoleon grew white with rage. He refrained from answering, as he felt he must reflect upon the penalty deserved by such audacity. He did not detain Talleyrand, who returned to Valençay to entertain his guests the Princes, the Emperor's prisoners. He had remained silent on that occasion when they were

alone, but he punished him cruelly at the Tuileries in the presence of the High Dignitaries of State.

The incident is not recorded in Talleyrand's Memoirs, The recollection of it could hardly have failed to hurt him. The scene took place in the presence of witnesses on the 28th of January, 1809. Decrès and Cambacérès were among those present. Talleyrand took his seat and prepared himself for the judgment which awaited him. As soon as Napoleon saw him his eyes glistened with rage and he burst forth in loud tones. He reproached him with recent facts and with facts of long ago. The peace of Presbourg, the terms of which had been modified by Talleyrand, was termed an act of treason on his part :

“ An infamous treaty wrought by corruption.”

These words were spoken with great violence. They were followed by the following invective : “ You are a thief, a coward, a man bereft of faith ; you do not even believe in God.”¹

Napoleon waxed indignant in the name of virtue, good faith and loyalty, he who had boasted of having netted by means of a contemptible trick the Princes to whom he had promised protection, and whose rights he had sworn to respect. The storm raged for over half an hour. Talleyrand let it run its course without saying a word or betraying a sign of emotion. He withdrew, his breast swollen with hatred which was soon to bear fruit.

This was the beginning of the tragic duel which was to be fought in the twilight between the Master of the world and Talleyrand.

Bonaparte often accused him personally of ingratitude, and entertained his circle with his complaints on this score. As he gave vent to his bitter feelings he seemed to forget the wise remark of Sainte-Beuve that certain benefits conferred are fruitful of good while others are but insults which alienate the gratitude and friend-

¹ He himself was perhaps the divinity to whom he referred (see p. 208).

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ship of those who receive them. Had not the same reasons produced similar effects in the case of his brothers? He did not reflect that he was relieving them from any debt of gratitude when he accompanied the gift of wealth and honours by laws of constraint and humiliating subjection. Yet he bitterly resented their conduct towards him. If each of them had faithfully carried out the missions entrusted to them, the clan of Bonaparte would have reached the poles. Gengis-Khan, who devastated the world, had met with better luck. His four sons vied in serving him, while Napoleon had to contend with Generals, Ministers, and above all, with Talleyrand!

Roederer has thus described how he was made the confidant of Napoleon's rancour at the Elysée on the 6th of May, 1809:

The Emperor was pacing the room, as was his wont whenever he started a long diatribe. He first expressed his dissatisfaction with his brother Joseph, a fellow who had been placed on the throne of Spain without being consulted and who now had the audacity to assume the airs and pretensions of a King. Joseph had just adopted the same line of conduct as his brother Louis Bonaparte. They both claimed full powers or the right to return to private life. This, indeed, was nice language on the part of his kinsman who owed him everything, even the delightful estate of Mortefontaine! Did it behove him to use the language of France's enemies? Did he wish to emulate the example of Talleyrand? His anger knew no bounds as he mentioned this last name ever present in his thoughts.

“Talleyrand! I have showered diamonds, gold, and honours upon him, as many weapons which he used in order to effect his betrayal at the very first opportunity. He has declared that he implored me on his knees to abandon the Spanish campaign, whereas for two long years he urged me to undertake it. Likewise in the case of the Duc d'Enghien. I did not know him; it was Talleyrand who made me know him. I did not even

know his whereabouts. It was he who revealed his hiding-place to me, and having advised me to kill him, he proceeded to deplore his death, together with his friends. I shall do him no harm. He shall remain in possession of his charges and his dignities, but I have forbidden him free access to my study. Henceforth he shall have no more private interviews with me, and he will thus be unable to boast of having advised me in one sense or another."

"He shall have no more private interviews with me," was one of the many oaths registered, but not kept. When grave issues were at stake, the Conqueror still felt the need of the diplomat's advice, though in the end he only followed his own inspiration and his own will. Moreover, it is difficult to say how much truth was really conveyed by this heated tirade. Napoleon declaimed it with closed doors and in conditions of intimacy which must have found him more or less cool and collected. It is certain, however, that he clothed facts in his own words as he thought fit and always presented them in a light which nullified his responsibilities towards nations and towards history.

Stormy meetings frequently occurred from 1809 till 1814. During one of those fits of temper, which he cultivated at will, he was not only content to revile him, but seized a chance of withering his Vice-Grand Elector with cruel ridicule. It was commonly known that the Princesse de Bénévent had become seriously compromised with the Duc de San-Carlos.

Napoleon heard the report, and during a State ball at the Tuileries he hurled it at Talleyrand's head. He called him a *Sganarelle*, and told him openly that he would do well to keep an eye upon his wife. The Prince preserved his freezing and imperturbable air, and said:

"Sire, I did not think that such a meagre detail could have any important bearing upon Your Majesty's glory or upon mine."

The answer was superb under the circumstances. It is hardly credible that Talleyrand remained insensible

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to an insult which would wound the honour and the pride of any man. It filled the cup of bitterness to overflowing and was the determining cause of his defection. Napoleon had felt no need to keep a watch on Talleyrand so long as the horizon remained cloudless, so long as the blue sky was not disturbed by the erratic course of his stormy policy. When that sky darkened and the perspective was far from clear, he realised that a man lived in his shadow who breathed reproach upon every gesture of his, a man who was a respectful and a silent enemy, whose dumb disapproval checkmated his plans and who secretly enjoyed all his failures. Such were represented by the many steps achieved towards the solution of some treasonable problem. Imbued with this conviction, he contemplated him daily, and was filled with rage at the sight of this inanimate face, this frigid and solemn countenance, this almost impudent self-mastery which no event seemed able to affect.

This man continued to wear the insignia of the honours and dignities conferred upon him. He enjoyed his income and emoluments with a dignity that spelt contempt for the donor thereof. The calmer he remained, the more did the Emperor wax furious. Talleyrand's enemies fanned the Master's ire until he was almost beside himself when confronted by this individual, whose manner was both haughty and submissive.

Shortly after the Dresden campaign Napoleon awoke one morning in a very nervous and excitable condition. On seeing Talleyrand at the foot of his bed his irritability increased.

“Do not go; I wish to speak to you.” He then apostrophised him in a violent tone.

“What have you come here for? Is it to show me your ingratitude? You boast of belonging to the Opposition. You think that if I happened to die, you would be the head of a Council of Regency!

“I may warn you that if I ever fall dangerously ill, you shall die before I do.”

The threat was answered by a compliment, delivered in the tone in which a graceful courtier would have acknowledged the receipt of fresh favours.

“Sire, such a warning was not necessary to compel me to pray daily for Your Majesty’s welfare.”

Napoleon’s impatience and hatred grew worse when he beheld this calm and mysterious enemy. At times he felt inclined to strike him in the face and perturb his motionless elegance. He could hardly contain himself and seized every opportunity to vent his ire upon him. When the opportunity was lacking he created it. As his policy of aggression met with fresh reverses, all of which were keenly observed by the one who, he felt, was awaiting the end with intent satisfaction, his choler became more and more acute and its counterblasts gathered stronger against this bulwark of insensibility.

The last outburst of imperial temper occurred on the eve of Napoleon’s departure for the campaign of 1814. Towards the end of the Council meeting he had declared in loud tones that he was surrounded by traitors. As he spoke these words he accentuated their meaning by turning towards Talleyrand. He looked at him sternly and during several minutes he riddled him with harsh and offensive reproaches. The diplomat was standing near the fire-place, preserving his eyes from its glow with his hat and looking far away perfectly unconcerned.

When the Emperor had finished his indictment he left the hall and slammed the door behind him. Talleyrand then sought the arm of M. Mollien, and slowly descended a staircase without uttering a word, without a gesture, but with a keen recollection of all that had been said. Once more was he confirmed in his conviction that no principle of honour would bind him to a man who had outraged him in such a fashion.

Napoleon and Talleyrand inveighed against each other in a vocabulary almost identical. The Emperor called him an unfrocked priest, a revolutionist, a

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scoundrel, and in return his Minister, applied to the man of genius such epithets as “ bandit, highway robber, and lawless brigand.”

Long after his downfall, Bonaparte indulged in retrospective anger and fulminated against the statesman. According to him he was the vilest of Jacobins, who had often advised the assassination of the Bourbons. He had also suggested that they should be spirited away by pirates. He solemnly asserted these facts to Sir Neil Campbell,¹ the British officer told off by his Government to accompany the captive of the Holy Allies from Fontainebleau to Elba. He expressed no regret at the execution of the Duc d'Enghien, but spared no effort to assign it to the promptings of Talleyrand.

Napoleon made these statements in the exasperation caused by his downfall, which he felt was due to Talleyrand and to his own pride. He was a distorter of the truth and never stopped to inquire into the concordance of his statements, caring little on principle whether they were not already belied by previous ones uttered under different circumstances.

Napoleon had strong cause for resentment. The struggle between him and his antagonist was not ended by the abdication of Fontainebleau.

When Napoleon returned from the island of Elba, he declared Talleyrand to be an outlaw. The diplomat returned the compliment by having him banned at the Congress of Vienna. In the Memoirs dictated by him at Saint-Helena, Bonaparte often repeated his accusations against the Lord High Chancellor. It was through his fault that the torrent of the Allied Armies had rushed into France and that his defeat had been compassed. Every fact that he could recollect was used by him against the man, in denial of the services he had rendered and as a motive of attack upon his private life. He repeated that the Prince was the King

¹ *Diary of Sir Neil Campbell.* London, 1869.

of knaves and that the Princess was the dullest of women.

Over and over again he related the anecdote of the Duchesse de Talleyrand, who was said to have mistaken Sir Thomas Robinson, the British diplomat, for Robinson Crusoe, the legendary hero of Daniel de Foé. Rumour had it, he said, that she attributed the same identity to Denon, on his return to Egypt, and to Humboldt, on his return from everywhere. He did not add much about Mme de Talleyrand, nor did he state in his memoranda the reasons for which he had forbidden her to appear at Court. He always resumed his attacks upon the constant opponent of his policy, upon the vices, the felonies, the venality and the black ingratitude of Talleyrand.

Talleyrand's venality must have been revolting, if all that has been written of it be true.¹ Talleyrand was too fond of money and this was interpreted by Napoleon as a grievous crime, for which he often upbraided him during his reign.

He once said to him unawares: "Now, Talleyrand, tell me, with your hand upon your conscience, how much you have made out of me?"

On another occasion he put the very same question to a member of the Confederation of the Rhine:

"How much did Talleyrand cost you?"

He was keenly interested in these questions of figures, although he dived deep into the coffers of France and of Europe, without deigning to render an account to anyone.² His insistence and his studied rudeness to-

¹ Talleyrand's corruption surpassed every example afforded by ancient and modern times. Both his corruption and his greed exceeded all bounds respected hitherto (*Memoirs of Field-Marshal Marmont*, vol. vii., p. 3).

² Talleyrand often pretended to be in straitened circumstances, in order to throw Napoleon off the scent and to put a stop to his reproaches and his teasing. The Emperor never lost a chance of quipping him about the contents of his safe and the brilliant Pactolus in which he was supposed to swim.

He once said: "They say I am a miser, Talleyrand."

This was stated of him because he audited the expenditure of the Palace, though he spared no expense on State occasions. Talleyrand

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wards Talleyrand only accentuated established facts concerning diplomatic corruption which were known to all.

The practices for which he indicted his opponent had been in vogue since the Directoire, in almost every Chancery. The French Government took the lion's share in the division of secret "Douceurs" handed to negotiators, because France was the conquering nation. It was a system of give and take, an exchange of presents and gratuities. Under the Consulate, Bonaparte himself had recommended to Talleyrand the German envoy, who had arrived in Paris on the 2nd Thermidor, year VIII, while diplomatic proceedings were proceeding between France and Austria :

"I have not yet made any presents to M. Saint-Julien, because the jewels of the Directoire are antiquated. Such things have not been worn for the last hundred years."¹

When he sent his brother Lucien as ambassador to Spain he gave him the following family advice :

"Do not fail to come back a rich man."

So well was this advice followed that he returned with scores of diamonds, which he resold in Holland, and with millions, which made him the richest of all the Bonapartes. This money was lavished both in Paris and Madrid, and on his return Lucien entertained in princely fashion in the Hôtel de Brissac and at Plessis-Chamant, his country place.

Napoleon considered that his brother had acted very wisely, but he held a very different opinion of Prince de Bénévent. He declared that he had appointed the Duc de Cadore in his stead, because he was tired of his petty tricks and jobbing propensities.

replied that he was right to give good example and to put a stop to wasteful extravagance.

"You are rich, Talleyrand, and I shall come to you when I am in need of money."

The subtle courtier replied : "I am far from rich, but I hold all I have at the disposal of Your Majesty, from whom I have received it."

¹ Talleyrand's letter to Napoleon, 28th July (National Archives of France, fol. 4, p. 658).

It was easier to invoke this grievance than to quote the true cause of his anger, which resided in the disapproval by his Minister of the continental blockade and of a policy that perpetuated warfare in Europe.

Talleyrand followed Figaro's advice :

"What is good to take is good to keep."

He confessed to having received presents from nations, great and small, to the extent of about 60,000,000 francs.¹ Such transactions were not perhaps deserving of moral praise, but they only jeopardised individual interests. This fact should lessen the blame attached to his actions. He considered them in the light of remunerative but secondary elements in the general discussion of major interests. They did not warp the main lines of his foreign policy, nor did they hinder the preponderance of France upon the Continent, or hamper the rights of nations in Europe. Upon those grounds he deemed himself entitled to levy some tribute in exchange for private concessions obtained through his influence.

Count de Senfft, an impartial contemporary of his, bore witness that while profiting by his position in order to increase his fortune by more or less questionable efforts, no personal motive could ever induce him to favour plans opposed to his general policy. With this reservation he lost no chance of increasing his wealth. His services were rewarded in cash, not in diamond snuff-boxes or in walking-sticks. He was amply remunerated before the Princes of Schwartzenberg, Nassau, Waldeck, Lippe, and Reuss were admitted into the Confederation of the Rhine.

Napoleon was not aware of this until it was too late to forbid their admission. Talleyrand had carefully avoided acting in his own name, but had entrusted the matter to Baron de Gagern, Minister to the Duc de Nassau, an able and sagacious man.

Propriety was duly respected during the course of

¹ £2,400,000.

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his foreign policy. It is undeniable that ever since the inception of these negotiations, no mention had been made of a bargain and no positive offers had been necessary in order to achieve the desired end. M. de Talleyrand had been good enough not to state his price, having left the discussion of money matters to his faithful intermediary, the Comte de Sainte-Foix, who knew the value of the Prince's services. Every diplomatic transaction was effected upon a financial basis, but in a delicate and discreet manner. Napoleon was well aware of the fact and was far from pleased. Talleyrand had not the same scruples as his Master. He argued that an exalted position was a gold mine which should be explored; it would have been wrong of him to neglect a chance of providing funds for his enormous expenses, whatever his private income might be. He gave large sums to his brothers and nephews, as well as to his friends, and he considered it the duty of the confederated Princes to recognise the services he had rendered to them. His conscience did not trouble him, and he invoked the foregoing reasons in mitigation of his venial sins, those venial sins which he could not deny. Cupidity was the one weak point in his political morality. History contains another brief indictment against Talleyrand. History says that the Minister, Prince de Bénévent, Arch-Chancellor of State, Vice-Grand Elector, Lord High Chamberlain, upon whom the Emperor had lavished honours and wealth, conspired against that Emperor and brought about his downfall. Let us consider the reasons and arguments which can be invoked and may secure his acquittal upon this charge.

.

“The betrayal of a tyrant is a noble act,” declares Corneille in his tragedy entitled *Cinna*.

This maxim, so generous in the excuses it affords and so accommodating to the needs of the conscience, could have been invoked in justification of his own conduct

if he had condescended to apply the word betrayal to the Presbourg interviews. Talleyrand joined his Master's adversaries, because he held that their cause was the cause of right and justice. It is beyond doubt that while serving Napoleon he acted as Europe's Minister by endeavouring to bridle an inordinate ambition which in his mind was criminal, because of all the blood that was spilt to satisfy its thirst. Behold him at work during the course of some arduous negotiations. See how he entangles all the threads, prompting Nesselrode, urging Alexander, advising Napoleon in contradictory fashion, shuffling and mixing the Russian and French cards, imparting information to Metternich, preparing the return of the monarchy with his friends at home, intriguing, plotting, deceiving and conspiring. He hopes and foresees that one inevitable result will accrue from all this, the end of a period of domination which holds France in a state of consternation and of awe. His attitude was the more ambiguous, owing to the official nature of the part he had to play. He defended that attitude by adducing in its favour motives of a higher order. On the one hand the country had to contend with the pretensions of a permanent agitator anxious for supreme and absolute power, always on the offensive or the defensive, a man who constituted a real source of danger and who must by some means or another be eliminated from the existence of nations. On the other hand he beheld France as a victim, down-trodden, crushed by this unbounded appetite for expansion which was out of all proportion with her strength and resources and therefore bound to cause the direst disasters. He had carefully separated the cause of the nation from that of the Emperor when deciding upon a course of action.

It was the condition of France and of French public opinion that determined the devious direction he followed. One and all were tired unto death of a condition of endless upheaval. The population was reeling under excessive taxation, and wise folk contemplated with

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sadness the yearly levies which were exhausting all the reserves of youth and strength possessed by the country.

During the Spanish War, an ingenuous man and a humble priest had used the same arguments as Talleyrand, Fouché and many others, when urging the necessity to put a brake upon this frenzy which would not have spent itself until it had pulverised Europe from north to south and east to west. He, too, was convinced that the dream and its tragic realities had lasted all too long when he implored of General Wellington to assume the offensive, to attack, after crossing the Bidassoa :

“ The Colossus has feet of earth ; attack him vigorously and you will see him crumbling away much quicker than you think.”

Talleyrand had likewise stimulated Alexander and Francis II, entreating of them to perform that work of deliverance, the coming of which was near at hand.

Napoleon had asserted that a day would come when he would gladly pursue a course of peace, bringing happiness to the world and earning the blessings of all men. These were assertions of the morrow. He never could have stopped on the road to conquests. It was he who said to Bourrienne :

“ I owe my greatness to my sword and my fame to those victories which have brought wealth to France. I can only defend my position by fighting more wars and gaining more territory.”

If it be true that the wars of the Revolution and the spirit of conquest to which they gave birth had placed Bonaparte in an impossible position ; if it be true that he could only reign by constant appeals to arms, by ceaseless and sweeping victories (terms which mean the extermination of the weak and the sharing of their spoils by the strong, who in turn must fight over the booty), was it not preferable for the sake of universal peace to overthrow even with foreign help a man con-

sidered by kings and people as the implacable enemy of human peace and happiness ?

Talleyrand no doubt considered such reasons to be unanswerable and felt that they would justify his want of loyalty in the double game he played with Napoleon and with Europe. He was also convinced that both contemporary opinion and history would exonerate him of such blame as his treachery might have earned him. His defence has ignored two counts which constitute vulnerable points in his armour. He handed secret plans to the enemies of his country and continued in the pay of Napoleon while compassing his loss. Should he not have left the Emperor's service before calling Metternich to his side or showing the way to the Emperor of Russia ?

Treason is written across such conduct, however praiseworthy his theoretical intention of ridding France of an intolerable yoke. In truth, he had made a litter of such scruples as were likely to hamper stout resolutions. In his opinion, the end justified the means. Such as he conceived them, his views were the outcome of a legitimate object, and his mode of operation was one so constantly practised that it was hardly queried. He had intrigued, plotted and broken his word, but in this he only followed the example of many princely consciences in Europe.

Frederick II had already recognised the prevalence of these methods in his letter to Voltaire, dated 8th August, 1736.

“ Nowadays the good faith of Princes is little worthy of respect.”¹

Talleyrand had betrayed Bonaparte and Bonaparte had been ungrateful to Barras, to whom he owed every-

¹ Frederick spoke as an expert. None better than he knew the elastic value of a world of honour. He was, besides, a comedian of the first water. When Dorget lost his wife, Frederick wrote him a most Christian and pathetic letter while on the same day he hurled a vicious epigram at the memory of the deceased lady.

“ All this affords much food for reflection ” (Voltaire's letter to Mme Denis, 17th November, 1750).

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thing, including his wife. He played false to the Republic, just as he deceived everyone on the eve of the 18th Brumaire. By swearing to respect the liberty which he was about to strangle, he deceived Barras, Gohier and his own brother Lucien. Talleyrand was far from being a model of loyalty, constancy, or of candour, but the Emperor was a terrible man from a moral or private point of view. He did not believe in gratitude, and said so. He attached no price to unselfish or disinterested actions, and said so.¹ He denied the existence of all good faith, and believed that hypocrisy and self-pride were the *leit motifs* of humanity.

He held that a politician's actions were good or bad according to the party to which he belonged, adding that such terms as right and wrong did not exist in political questions. Laws, principles and rules of convention and propriety were necessary for the welfare of society and the policing thereof, but he, the predestined mortal, had no use for them. He was a man unlike other men, and could not be hampered by such petty trammels. He was therefore armed with a law of exception, a State maxim for the vindication of his passions and his violence. This spirit of morality obtained throughout his family, and it cannot be said that he found faithful supporters in his brothers, sisters, or in some of his Generals, who had earned wealth and preferment at his hands.

Double dealing prevailed all over Europe, treachery was rife in every soul. The generous Emperor of Russia, the noble Alexander, received a touching letter from the King of Prussia, and on the very next day he thought it a most natural proceeding to propose to the Ambassador of Austria a division of the remains of the kingdom, the appanage of his ally, his most intimate friend.

The same reproach of disloyalty and bad faith was

¹ All his hatred and affection were dictated by motives of self-interest (*Pasquier's Memoirs*, vol. i., p. 149).

not only richly deserved by the Cabinet of Vienna, but also by every Chancery in Europe. The golden rule followed by all the heads of State was to conclude peace with one nation so as to crush another, and then to effect an alliance with the defeated country in order to attack the undefeated one.

All those who handled the threads of foreign politics looked upon intrigue and double dealing as legitimate and indispensable elements of success. They considered them the only means of overcoming intolerable situations imposed upon Europe by the abuse of strength. Having endeavoured to save the Empire in 1810, 1812, and 1813, Talleyrand precipitated its downfall and thus hastened a catastrophe that had become inevitable, thanks to the combined hatred of Europe. The march of events had justified his predictions up to the hilt.

After twenty-two years of incessant strife and extermination among the nations of Europe, the world had endorsed the views expressed by him in 1792¹ and accepted by England as propounding the only conditions likely to ensure a lasting peace. Austria had also adopted those views since the treaty of Lunéville and they were the constant thought and enduring object of all succeeding coalitions.

Talleyrand has been justly reproached for having accepted vast presents at a period when it was customary to do so. It would be idle to deny his constant and very remunerative complacencies towards fortune, because he himself has left many proofs in

¹ In his report addressed from London and dated November, 1792, he warned the Committee of Public Safety to safeguard the young Republic against the intoxication of victory and an immoderate thirst for conquest :

“ The reign of illusions has gone for ever, the ripe soul of France could not be seduced by these great political considerations which had misled her and prolonged her period of infancy in so deplorable a manner. The territory of the French Republic was sufficient for the needs of the population and of those vast industrial combinations which will be born of the genius of Liberty. This territory could not be increased without jeopardising the happiness of the old as well as the new citizens of France. It was therefore advisable to reject all projects of union, of foreign incorporation which might be suggested in a spirit of gratitude more zealous than enlightened.”

the hands of the prosecution. Craft, cupidity and cunning were his partners in most of his undertakings.

Notwithstanding all he did and all his faults, he never caused any serious prejudice to the welfare of the nation. His love for his country remained strong and sincere in the folds of his sceptical soul, though he hurled passing imprecations against that "land of terrorists."¹

Throughout all his quick changes and metamorphoses he remained faithful to his early conceptions of a progressive and moderate form of Liberalism. He was truly a friend of humanity in the pacific sense of the word. As Minister under two bellicose Governments, he condemned the acts of spoliation signed by him as iniquitous and transient in their effects.

Between 1808 and 1813 four hundred thousand lives were lost to France owing to the private quarrels between the potentates of Europe and the Sovereign whom she had chosen as her Master. Under the Directoire, the Consulate, and during the latter years of the Empire, he resisted a policy of annexation and dismemberment which must inevitably have led to armed collisions and perpetuated the causes of war. Both his mind and soul were saddened by the spirit of destruction.²

"What care I for two hundred thousand men?" said the Emperor to Metternich. "Men like me pay little heed to the loss of a million of men."

Why were all these human beings doomed to suffering and to death? Because Austria had refused to yield another province which blocked the highway of his dreams between Rome and Constantinople.

Both his tastes and his doctrines dictated a love

¹ On leaving London, the 1st of March, 1794, he wrote to Mme de Staël: "Use every effort to remove Madame de Laval from our horrible France. I thank you beforehand for all your efforts in this sense."

² "I realise with pain and sorrow that the strength of this man's hatred is far stronger in him than all human considerations, including that of his personal interests. The ordinary thought of man cannot grasp or measure the idea of unrivalled greatness and prosperity, bereft of all sense of jealousy" (*Talleyrand's Memoirs*, vol. i., p. 73).

of peace to Talleyrand, while Napoleon was devoted to war by instinct and also by the intoxication of cruel glory. If Talleyrand at times failed to accomplish good, he never encouraged evil. He respected the principles of liberty, of individual or collective property, and claimed that all men had an equal right to live. His memory has not been besmirched by any blood spilt through his own fault or sacrificed to his own interests.

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